

Antibiotics for UTI in Older Adults

A urinary tract infection (UTI) may cause symptoms like:

- Burning with urination
- Increased urge to urinate
- Need to urinate more often

Several common symptoms do not necessarily indicate a UTI:

- Confusion
- Weakness
- Cloudy/foul-smelling urine

Urine should only be tested when UTI symptoms are present.

Antibiotics should only be given when UTI symptoms are present.

Giving antibiotics when not needed may lead to:

- Side effects (nausea, etc.)
- *C. difficile* diarrhea
- Drug-resistant germs



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Antibiotics for Urinary Tract Infections in Older Adults



*Information for patients
and families*

Antibiotics for UTI in Older Adults

Urinary Tract Infections

Antibiotics are commonly used in older adults to treat Urinary Tract Infections (UTI).

UTI may cause symptoms like:

- Burning when urinating
- A strong urge to urinate
- The need to urinate often

UTI may also cause fever, urine leakage, pain in the back or sides, or blood in the urine.

How is a UTI identified?

A UTI is found based on the symptoms a person has **and** the presence of abnormal urine tests (urinalysis or urine culture).

Unfortunately, urine testing is often not helpful in identifying older adults who need antibiotics. Many older adults may have abnormal urine tests without a UTI and often receive antibiotics when they have no UTI symptoms.

When antibiotics should be used

Antibiotics are needed if a person has UTI symptoms and/or fever.

If an older person does not have symptoms of a UTI, then antibiotics will not help, even when bacteria are seen in the urine.

Why should antibiotics be avoided if not needed?

Antibiotics have side effects:

Allergic reaction, fever, rash, nausea, vomiting, kidney damage, diarrhea.

Antibiotics increase the risk for future infections:

Antibiotics can kill “good” germs natural to our body. This can lead to a potentially fatal and severe diarrhea caused by *C. difficile*.

Antibiotics promote “stronger,” resistant germs:

Antibiotics can make germs become “drug resistant”, which means they are harder to kill with commonly used antibiotics and fewer treatment choices are available.

Common myths

Sometimes, other symptoms that older adults experience can be confused with a UTI. The following symptoms **do not** necessarily indicate a UTI especially if there are no other urinary symptoms or fever:

- Confusion
- Falling
- Cloudy/foul-smelling urine
- Muscle weakness



Doctors and other practitioners are not always sure what may be causing the symptoms in a patient, and sometimes the best option for the patient is observation and monitoring.