

Acute Kidney Infection

Contributed by Robert A Wilson
Sunday, 11 February 2007
Last Updated Friday, 08 February 2008

Pyelonephritis is an infection involving the kidneys. As with all urinary tract infections, it occurs more frequently in women, due to their shorter urinary tract and urethral opening being close to the vagina and rectum. Intestinal bacteria present in these locations can easily contaminate the urethra with sexual intercourse or by wiping incorrectly after bowel movements or urinating. Most urinary tract infections are confined to the bladder, but sometimes the bacteria "climbs" the ureter (tube draining urine from the kidney to the bladder) and infects the kidney. Kidney infections may also be caused by obstructions (kidney stones, tumors, or developmental abnormalities), or blood infections. Men who develop urinary tract or kidney infections often have an underlying abnormality, such as prostate disease or enlargement, or obstruction from tumors or developmental abnormalities. You are more likely to develop a kidney infection when there is insertion of foreign materials into the urethra such as urinary catheters, or instruments used in diagnostic or surgical procedures; if you have diabetes, chronic urinary bladder infections, bladder tumors; if you tend to hold urine instead of voiding frequently; are pregnant or have lower extremity paralysis.

Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Chills, often severe
- Painful and/or frequent urination
- Back or flank pain
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea, with or without, vomiting
- Fatigue or malaise
- Cloudy or bloody urine; Foul smelling urine

{mospagebreak title=What your doctor can do}

What your doctor can do:

- Diagnose acute pyelonephritis by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam, and ordering laboratory tests.
- Order a urinalysis to identify the bacteria and be able to select the most effective antibiotic.
- Arrange cystoscopy (a procedure that views the urinary tract using a small scope)
- Order imaging tests of the kidneys, which may include ultrasound or an IVP (using an intravenous dye with X-ray imaging to evaluate the urinary tract system).
- Prescribe antibiotics to help fight bacterial infections.
- Recommend hospitalization for pregnant women with kidney infections or men who often have obstructions that require surgical correction.

{mospagebreak title=What you can do}

What you can do:

- Rest as much as possible, until pain and fever are gone.
- Avoid sexual activity until infection is eliminated.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Cranberry juice is especially good since the vitamin C helps to decrease the bacteria colonies.
- Follow-up with your physician as instructed. Additional urine testing is often needed.
- Prevention includes:
 - Drink plenty of fluids each day.
 - Always wipe from front to back after urinating and especially after bowel movements.
 - Avoid holding urine when there is an urge to urinate.
 - Avoid sexual positions that are painful or irritating to your urethra or bladder.
 - Urinate before and after sexual intercourse.
 - Seek medical care promptly if you suspect you have a bladder infection.

What you can expect:

Possible complications include chronic kidney infection, high blood pressure, and kidney failure.

Contact your doctor if your symptoms and fever continue longer than 48 hours after beginning antibiotics, if your symptoms return after completing the antibiotics, or if you develop new or unexplained symptoms.