



# THE AGEING BLADDER AND URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

Following on from the June issue of **FORWARD**, which provided information relating to your questions about bowel health, this issue answers your questions about urinary tract infections.

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**A**s the bladder ages, it loses tone, the lining becomes thinner and its ability to store urine is reduced. It may also not empty completely, which increases the risk of developing a urinary tract infection (UTI). These changes in bladder structure and function may necessitate an adjustment to your normal routine. For example, you may consider increasing the number of times you empty your bladder in a 24-hour period, or change to a different bladder management system.

UTIs are one of the most common reasons for seeking medical advice and readmissions to hospital amongst the SCI population. UTIs can predispose to a variety of other conditions such as bladder and kidney stones. Frequent infections can affect your self-esteem, social life and may result in periods of time off work.

## UTI'S CAN CAUSE UNPLEASANT SYMPTOMS, INCLUDING:

- **High temperature**
- **Shivering and sweating**

- **Headaches**
- **Nausea**
- **Lethargy**
- **A general feeling of being unwell**
- **Pain, if you have sensation**
- **Strong smelling urine with a cloudy appearance**

You may experience an increase in spasms and, if susceptible, a UTI may precipitate an episode of Autonomic Dysreflexia.

## HOW TO PREVENT A UTI

### Eat and drink for a healthy bladder

Infections tend to attack the body when your resistance is low, so boosting your immune system through increasing your intake of essential vitamins and minerals is important.

## WHICH VITAMINS AND MINERALS ARE IMPORTANT?

- **Vitamin A** helps your immune system fight infections. It also has a role in keeping skin healthy and helping vision in dim light. Sources: eggs, cheese, carrots, oily fish, spinach, kale and sweet potatoes.
- **Vitamin C** helps fight infections. It plays a part in the production of antibodies and keeping your immune system healthy. Sources: found in citrus fruit, green and red peppers, strawberries and broccoli.

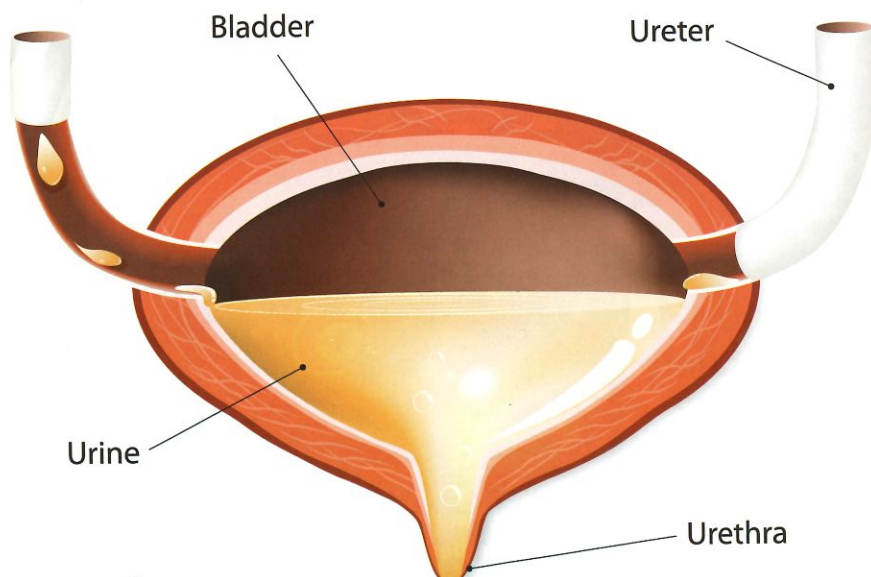
• **Garlic** is a good source of vitamins B6 and C, magnesium, selenium and other important minerals such as phosphorous, calcium and potassium. It has long been used to help fight infections and is also good for digestion.

• **Zinc** plays a part in the production of white blood cells which help fight infections by attacking or 'mopping up' bacteria and viruses which invade the body on a daily basis. Sources: red meat, oats and yoghurt.

Keeping your urine slightly acidic helps to prevent infections and the formation of stones, both in the kidneys and the bladder. Everyday foods and drinks can affect the pH balance of your urine (acidic versus alkaline balance). Eating citrus fruit and drinking juices such as cranberry can help to keep urine acidic; this can be in juice or tablet form.

Research demonstrates that chemicals (tannins) found in cranberry juice alter the activity of certain bacteria by preventing them sticking to the lining of the bladder. The current recommended amount is two tablespoons of pure, unsweetened cranberry juice, twice daily.

*NB – There can be a high percentage of sugar in some brands of cranberry juice and drinking a lot of concentrated juices, such as orange juice, should be avoided.*

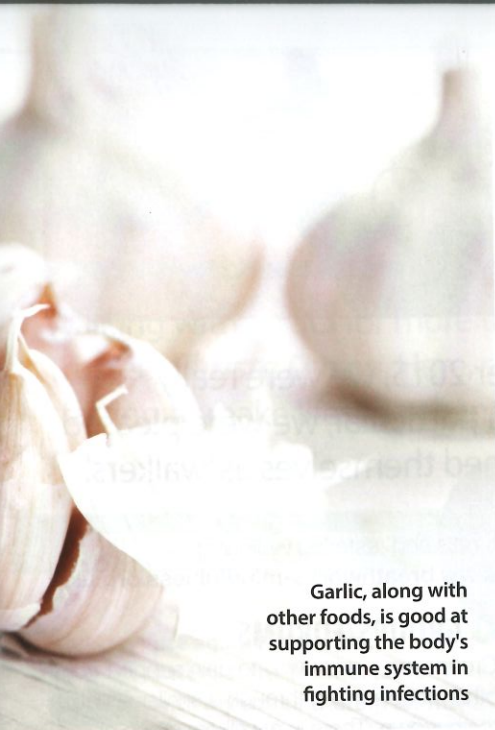


## PROBIOTICS

Despite the vast amount of research that has been carried out in recent years, opinions still differ as to the benefits that can be gained from taking daily probiotics. As well as being essential for keeping your digestive system healthy, probiotics also help maintain your immune system.

If you have taken courses of antibiotics over a long period of time to fight an infection, then you may be developing a





Garlic, along with other foods, is good at supporting the body's immune system in fighting infections

**Bladder problems were reported as one of the top three health priorities in SIA's Living Well Survey 2014.**

resistance to certain antibiotics. Antibiotics contribute to altering the balance of the 'good' bacteria which live in the body.

Certain probiotics can help reduce the number of UTIs you have. Taking a daily dose of probiotics, particularly strains of *Lactobacillus*, can help prevent and fight UTIs. You will need a brand which contains a minimum of eight million live cultures per capsule. After opening, store in a cool place or in the fridge.

### FOODS WHICH CONTAIN PROBIOTICS

The easiest and probably most popular way to include probiotics in your diet is by eating live-cultured yogurt. For best effect, try to include this at least three times per

week. Other foods to consider are dark chocolate, pickles, and miso soup.

D-Mannose is gaining popularity in the prevention of UTIs. It is a naturally occurring sugar similar to glucose and works by helping to prevent certain bacteria clinging to the bladder wall. You can take D-Mannose as a supplement in capsule or powder form. It can be found in cranberries, other berries, apples and peaches.

Caffeine-based drinks and alcohol can irritate your urinary tract so these are best reduced or avoided when you have a UTI.

### BLADDER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- Cleanliness is crucial. Hand washing (you/your carer) is essential to help avoid infections
- Keep all equipment to be used for bladder management clean and away from dirty areas
- If you have a supra-pubic catheter, the area around the catheter should be kept clean and dry
- Emptying the bladder properly is important – residual urine (urine that remains in the bladder after catheterisation/emptying), can become infected
- Try to reduce the risk of contamination from people who are delivering your care – carers, GPs, nurses etc.

### RECONSIDER YOUR BLADDER MANAGEMENT

Is it time to reconsider your bladder management? UTIs are more common as you age with your SCI. This could in part be due to a weakened immune system.

If changes occur to your normal bladder habits, try not to put certain changes down to ageing alone. It is important to report any change to an appropriate healthcare professional. You can also discuss alternative solutions with them.

### BLADDER INVESTIGATIONS/SCREENING

**Check-ups:** Having regular, possibly annual, medical checks-ups of your bladder and kidneys (urodynamics) is very important, especially if you have been SCI for many years. If you haven't received an appointment from your SCI Centre in a number of years, give them a ring to remind them. Equally, don't leave new symptoms unchecked by waiting to report them at your next appointment.

#### Blood in Pee campaign

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

The campaign targets people aged over 50 with the message – if you notice blood in your pee, even if it's 'just the once', tell your doctor. The chances are it's nothing serious but bladder and kidney cancers are more treatable if they are found early. This year's campaign also promotes a "look before your flush" message, particularly to women, who may be less likely to do so.

#### UTI treatment

Medical treatment usually consists of a course of antibiotics. If UTIs occur frequently there is an increased risk of septicaemia (blood poisoning) and long-term complications such as bladder and kidney stones.

If you decide to change to a supra-pubic catheter, try to talk to other people who have already made the change.

Keeping a daily diary will help you to monitor what changes are occurring, how frequently they occur and what effect any changes are having. The effects may be local, for example, increasing difficulty catheterising or if you are experiencing leakage, this may interfere with your daily life. A diary record is also useful when reporting changes to your spinal consultant or GP.

Give yourself time to adjust to any new regime and involve professionals, carers and family when appropriate.



Lactobacillus bacteria

➡ The following factsheets can be found on [www.spinal.co.uk](http://www.spinal.co.uk) under the Resources section:

- Steps to Ageing Well – Step 3 Caring for the Ageing Bladder
- Bladder Management

### CONTINENCE SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

- Your SCI Centre
- Continence Specialist Nurse employed by your local Clinical Commissioning Group
- Bladder and Bowel Foundation  
0845 345 0165  
[www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org](http://www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org)