

Urethritis in Men

Urethritis is an inflammation of the urethra, the canal in which urine and ejaculate are passed from the body through the penis. Urethritis can be due to many different infecting organisms. In college-aged men, urethritis is most commonly due to sexually transmitted organisms.

In some cases, the symptoms of urethritis may overlap, or appear similar, to those of a urinary tract infection (UTI). If a man has symptoms of a urinary tract infection but the lab tests fail to show infection with the bacteria that are known to cause that type of infection, then the symptoms may be due to a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

SYMPTOMS

- Discomfort urinating (dysuria)
- Penile discharge (a dripping of fluid from the penis commonly seen as a staining of underclothes)
- Increased frequency of urination
- Urgent need to urinate

COMMON CAUSES

Sexually transmitted urethritis is traditionally divided into two categories: Gonorrhea and Non-Gonococcal Urethritis (NGU). NGU accounts for the majority of cases of urethritis. Among the causes of NGU are chlamydia and ureaplasma and less frequently trichomonas and herpes.

Chlamydia has reached epidemic proportions in sexually active college-aged persons. Chlamydia is the fastest growing cause of STIs among heterosexuals in the United States. Mixed infections, with both gonorrhea and chlamydia, occur frequently.

DIAGNOSIS

History and Discussion of Sexual Issues: Evaluation of a man with symptoms of urethritis requires open and frank discussions of sexuality. The history of symptoms, sexual contacts, and methods of contraception (if applicable) can help guide the health care provider towards the correct diagnosis and, therefore, treatment.

Physical Examination: A focused physical examination needs to be performed. The exam includes evaluation of the throat, the skin for rashes, and the groin, penis, testicles, and, occasionally, the rectum.

Laboratory Testing: Your primary care provider may also wish to obtain a sample of the penile discharge for analysis under a microscope. Probes to test for gonorrhea and/or chlamydia may be performed. Certain tests may also be done on a urine specimen.

TREATMENT

Sexually transmitted urethritis can cause significant medical problems in men and their sexual partners if left untreated. All sexual partners must be tested.

Urethritis is treated with antibiotics. The choice of antibiotic will depend on the organism causing the infection. Since mixed infections are common, more than one drug may be prescribed. Most antibiotics are taken by mouth, but an injection might be needed. It is extremely important that the treatment be taken as prescribed by your primary care provider.

If your symptoms recur, or do not improve, you should schedule an appointment to see your primary care provider again. A recurrence of symptoms could happen if the infecting organism is resistant to the antibiotic chosen, or if you resume sexual contact with an untreated partner.

It is recommended that you both wait seven days after treatment has started before resuming sexual activity.

PREVENTION

Abstinence, safer sex, and condoms are the best ways to protect yourself and your partners from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Your primary care provider may talk with you about HIV disease and testing, Hepatitis B vaccination, Hepatitis A vaccination (for men whose sexual partners are other men), and other diseases. See [Condoms](#) for information about correctly using condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections.

SCHEDULING AN APPOINTMENT

Call 275-2662 to schedule an appointment at the University Health Service (UHS). UHS offers a full range of services. All visits to UHS are strictly confidential.

LINKS

University of Maryland Medical Center
<http://www.umm.edu/ency/article/000439.htm>

Medline PLUS
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000439.htm>