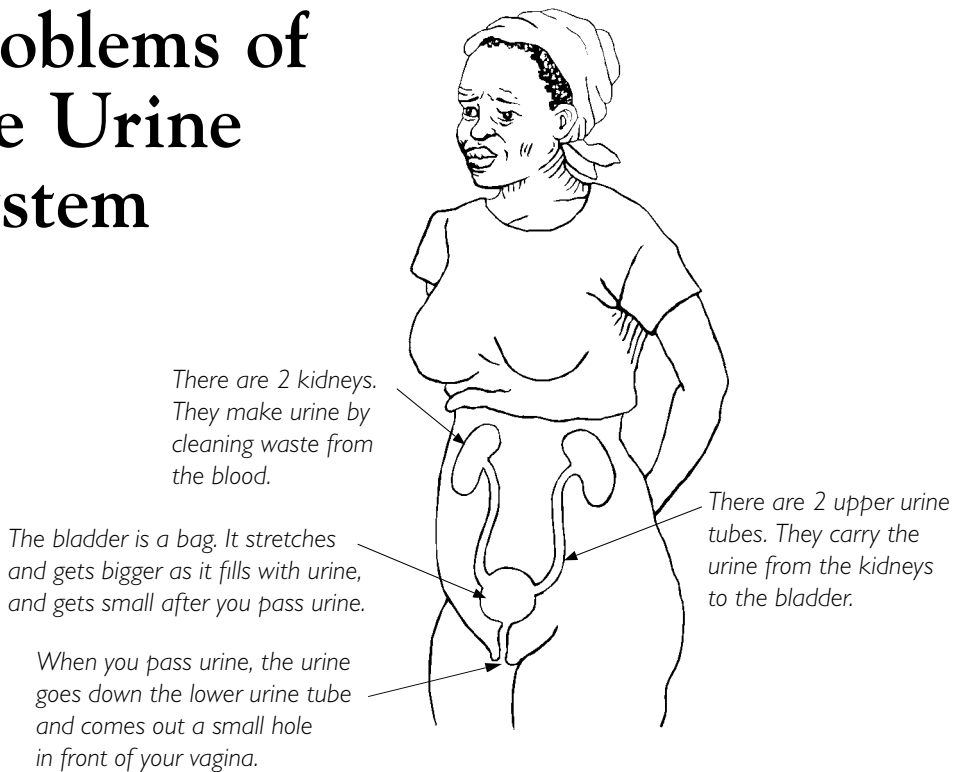


# Chapter 23

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# Problems of the Urine System



**T**his chapter describes the most common problems that affect the urine system. Sometimes these problems are difficult to tell apart. So if your problem seems different from those described here, get medical help. You may need special tests to find out what the problem is.

If you can identify the problem, it may be possible to treat the problem at home—especially if treatment is started right away. But remember that some serious problems begin with signs that do not seem very bad. These problems can quickly become painful and dangerous. So if you do not feel better within 2 to 3 days, get medical help.

## Female genital cutting

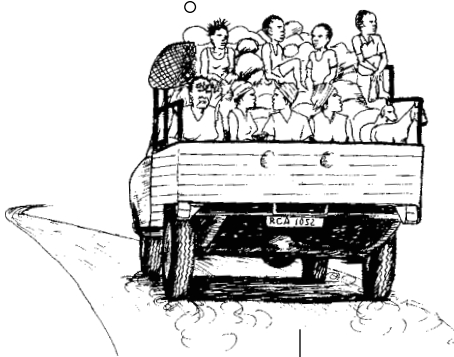
This can damage the urine system and cause serious health problems for a woman all her life. If you have been cut and have problems passing urine, or *infections* that return again and again, talk to a health worker. You may need surgery to correct the problem. For more information, see the chapter on “Female Genital Cutting,” page 459.

## Infections of the Urine System

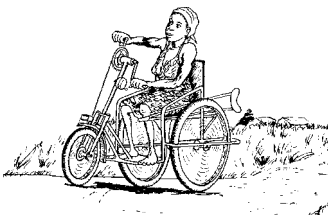


A girl or woman of any age—even a small baby—can get an infection of her urine system.

I hope the truck stops soon so I can pass urine.



► Teach little girls the correct way to wipe after passing stool.



There are 2 main kinds of urine system infections. A bladder infection is the most common and the easiest to treat. A kidney infection is very serious. It can lead to permanent damage to the kidney and even death.

### WHAT CAUSES BLADDER AND KIDNEY INFECTIONS?

Infections of the urine system are caused by *germs (bacteria)*. They get into the body from the outside through the urinary opening near the *vagina*. Infection is more common in women than in men because a woman's lower urine tube is short. Germs climb more easily up the short tube into the bladder.

Germs enter a woman's body or multiply when she:

- **has sex.** During sex, germs from the vagina and *anus* can be pushed up through the urinary opening into the lower urine tube. This is one of the most common causes of a bladder infection in women. To prevent infection, pass urine after having sex. This washes out the urine tube (but does not prevent pregnancy).
- **does not drink enough**, especially if she works outside in hot weather and sweats a lot. Germs will start to multiply in the empty bladder. Try to drink at least 8 glasses or cups (2 liters) of liquid a day. When working in the hot sun or in a hot room, drink even more.
- **goes for a long time without urinating** (for example, when traveling or working). Not urinating allows germs in the urine system to multiply which can cause an infection. Try to pass urine every 3 to 4 hours.
- **does not keep her genitals clean.** Germs from the *genitals*—and especially the *anus*—can get into the urinary opening and cause infection. Try to wash the genitals every day, and always wipe from front to back after passing stool (see page 154). Wiping forward can spread germs from the anus into the urinary opening. Also, try to wash your genitals before having sex. Keep the cloth and pads used for your monthly bleeding very clean between uses.
- **has a disability**, especially those from back-bone (spinal cord) injuries, or with a loss of feeling in the lower body. For more information, see the books *Where There Is No Doctor* and *A Health Handbook for Women with Disabilities*.
- **has HIV infection**, which makes it more difficult for the woman to fight infection.

## SIGNS AND TREATMENT

### Bladder infection signs:

- need to pass urine very often. (It may also feel as though some urine is still left inside.)
- pain or a burning feeling while passing urine
- pain in the lower belly just after passing urine
- urine smells bad, or looks cloudy, or has blood or *pus* in it. (Dark urine can be a sign of *hepatitis*. See page 277.)



### Kidney infection signs:

- any bladder infection signs
- fever and chills
- lower back pain, often severe, that can go from the front, around the sides, and into the back
- *nausea* and *vomiting*
- feeling very ill and weak

If you have signs of both a bladder and a kidney infection, you probably have a kidney infection.

Don't worry Lihua. I will help you get to the health center.



When a woman has a kidney infection, she may be in great pain and feel very ill. This can be very frightening. If this happens to you, try to get a family member or a neighbor to help you get to a health worker or health post.

**IMPORTANT** If your signs are serious, start taking medicine right away. See the next page.

### Treatment for a bladder infection:

Bladder infections can often be treated with home remedies.

**Start treatment as soon as you notice the signs.** A bladder infection can sometimes travel quickly up the urine tubes into the kidneys.

- **Drink a lot of water.** Try to drink at least one cup of clean water every 30 minutes. This will make you pass urine often. Sometimes the germs will wash out of your urine system before the infection gets worse.
- **Stop having sex** for a few days, or until the signs have gone away.



- **Make a tea** from flowers, seeds, and leaves that are known to help cure urine infections.

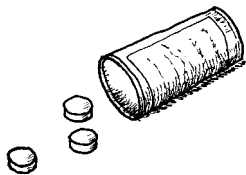
► STIs, especially *chlamydia*, can cause a burning feeling when a woman passes urine.

If you do not feel better in 1 to 2 days, stop taking the home remedies and start taking the medicines in the box below. If you do not feel better in 2 more days, see a health worker. You may have an STI rather than a urine system infection (see page 263).

**IMPORTANT** Before taking any of these medicines, especially if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, first read about them in the “Green Pages” of this book.

### Bladder Infection Medicines

Medicine	How much to take	When to take
cotrimoxazole . . . . .	2 tablets of 480 mg . . . . .	by mouth, 2 times a day for 3 days
(160 mg trimethoprim and 800 mg sulfamethoxazole)		
or		
nitrofurantoin . . . . .	100 mg . . . . .	by mouth, 2 times a day for 5 days
<p>If you do not start to feel better in 2 days (48 hours), there may be a resistance to these medicines in your area. If possible, check with a health worker, or take instead cephalexin, 500 mg, by mouth, 2 times a day for 7 days.</p>		



### Treatment for a kidney infection:

If you have signs of a kidney infection, home remedies are not enough. Start taking these medicines right away. But if you do not start to feel better after 2 days, see a health worker.

### Kidney Infection Medicines

Medicine	How much to take	When to take
ciprofloxacin . . . . .	500 mg . . . . .	by mouth, 2 times a day for 10 days
or		
cotrimoxazole . . . . .	2 tablets of 480 mg . . . . .	by mouth, 2 times a day for 10 days
(160 mg trimethoprim and 800 mg sulfamethoxazole)		
<p><b><u>If you cannot swallow medicines because you are vomiting, take:</u></b></p>		
ceftriaxone . . . . .	1 gram (1000 mg). . . . .	IV or IM, once a day
or		
gentamicin . . . . .	80 mg the first time only, . . . . .	IV or IM, 3 times a day
	then 60 mg each other time	
<p>When you can swallow medicine again without vomiting, stop injections and continue with the medicine by mouth for kidney infection, until you have taken medicine for a total of 10 days.</p>		

## BLOOD IN THE URINE

If your urine has blood in it, and if there are no other signs of a bladder or kidney infection, you may have bladder or kidney stones (see below). Or you may have one of these diseases, if they are common in your community:

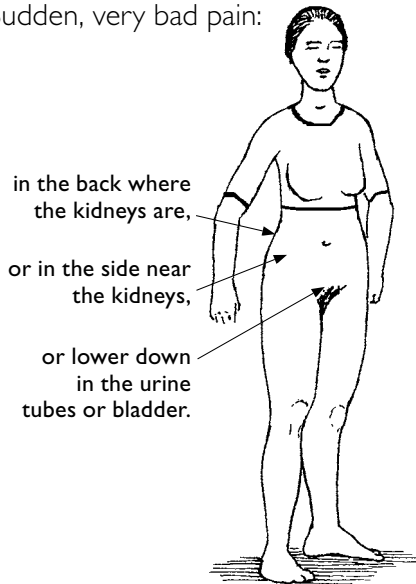
- **Bilharzia (blood flukes, schistosomiasis)** can cause permanent damage to the urine system if it is not treated early enough. See a health worker trained in problems of the urine system for treatment, and to learn how to prevent bilharzia from happening again. For more information about bilharzia, see *Where There Is No Doctor* or another general medical book.
- **Tuberculosis (TB)** can damage the bladder and kidneys. For more information, see page 387.

## KIDNEY OR BLADDER STONES

These are small hard stones that start to grow in the kidney, and then move through the urine system.

### Signs:

- Sudden, very bad pain:



### Other signs are:

- Blood in the urine. This can happen if the stones scratch the inside of the urine system.
- Difficulty passing urine. This can happen if a stone blocks the tubes.

### Treatment:

- Drink large amounts of liquid (at least 1 or 2 cups every 30 minutes). This will help wash the stone out of the kidney and down the urine tube.
- Take a pain medicine. If the pain is very bad, get medical help.

Sometimes the blocked urine tubes become infected. Treat this problem the same way you would treat a kidney infection.

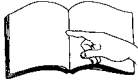
## Other Problems of the Urine System



tuberculosis



medicines for pain



growths, 380  
diabetes, 174

*This young woman's husband was embarrassed by the smell of her leaking urine. He made her leave his house.*



## NEED TO PASS URINE OFTEN

This may happen because:

- the muscles around your bladder and *womb* have become weak. The 'squeezing exercise' (page 371) may help strengthen these muscles.
- a growth (like a fibroid) in your abdomen is pushing against the bladder so it cannot hold much urine.
- you have a bladder infection.
- you have *diabetes*.

## LEAKING URINE

### Poor control of urine (incontinence)

This is caused by weak or damaged muscles around the bladder. It happens mainly to older women or to women after childbirth. The urine leaks out when a woman puts pressure on the weak muscles in her lower belly during sex, or by laughing, coughing, sneezing, or lifting. The 'squeezing exercise' (page 371) may help.

### Urine leaking from the vagina (*fistula*)

When a woman leaks urine all the time from the vagina, she may have a hole between her vagina and bladder. (Sometimes the hole is between the rectum and the vagina, and stool leaks out.)

This serious problem happens as a result of an obstructed childbirth, when the baby has difficulty getting out. It can happen to women of all ages. The baby's head presses on the skin between the bladder and the vagina (or the rectum and vagina). This causes an opening (*fistula*) to form between the bladder and the vagina (or the rectum and vagina). The baby is almost always born dead.

After the birth, the *fistula* does not heal on its own and urine or stool leaks out through the vagina all the time. The girl or woman has to clean herself continuously, and if she has extra cloth or a pad, she can wear this to stay dry.

If she cannot get help (see the next page), *fistulas* can cause serious problems for a girl or woman in her daily life. Her husband, family, and friends may avoid her because she smells of urine all the time. It may be difficult for her to earn money if she no longer can work, and she may feel extremely embarrassed and ashamed.

Some girls and women get "traumatic *fistula*" because of rape or other violent sexual actions such as a weapon being pushed into a vagina. This can cause tears inside the woman that also cause her to leak urine or stool. Girls and women with traumatic *fistula* will need support and counseling about the sexual violence, as well as surgery to repair the *fistula* and other damage to their genitals.

**Treatment:**

After the birth, if you are leaking urine or stool, talk with a health worker as soon as possible to find out if she or he knows of a hospital where the fistula can be repaired. You should **go to the hospital as soon as possible**. If you are leaking urine and cannot get to the hospital quickly, the health worker may know how to put in a plastic or rubber tube (catheter) through the urine hole into the bladder (see page 373). This tube will drain the urine and may help the fistula heal. **But you must still go to the hospital**. When you get there, the doctor will examine you to see if you need an operation to repair the fistula.

Do not despair. The problem can often be made better.

**IMPORTANT** *To help prevent infection while the tube is in, drink a lot of fluid (at least 10 to 12 cups a day). This will make you pass urine often and flush out germs.*

**Prevention:**

- Avoid marriage and pregnancy until a girl is 18 years old.
- All women should deliver their babies with a trained midwife or health worker.
- Women with extra risks should give birth at a hospital.
- Do not have babies too close together, so your muscles can get strong again in between births (see page 197).

► *If you have leaking urine or stool after giving birth, seek medical help right away.*

**The squeezing exercise**

This exercise can help strengthen weak muscles that cause you to pass urine often or to leak urine. First practice while you are passing urine. As the urine comes out, stop it by tightly squeezing the muscles in your vagina. Count to 10, then relax the muscles to let the urine come out. Repeat this several times whenever you urinate. Once you know how, practice the squeezing exercise at other times during the day. No one will know. Try to practice at least 4 times a day, squeezing your muscles 5 to 10 times each time.

Some women may need surgery to help control leaking urine. If you leak urine and this exercise does not help, get advice from a health worker trained in women's health. The squeezing exercise is good for all women to do every day. It helps keep muscles strong and can prevent problems later in life.





## When You Have Problems Passing Stool or Urine

**M**any women (and men) do not have normal control over when they pass stool or urine (especially persons who are near death, or who have a spinal cord injury, or a disability that affects the muscles of the lower body). This can be inconvenient and embarrassing. It can also cause skin problems and dangerous infections, so it is important to stay clean, dry, and healthy.

### Bowel control

This information will help those persons who have hard stools (constipation) or who have difficulty passing stool. You can learn to help the stool come out when it is easiest for you. The *bowels* work best when you are sitting rather than lying, so try to remove the stool when you are sitting on a toilet or pot. If you cannot sit, try to do it lying on your left side.

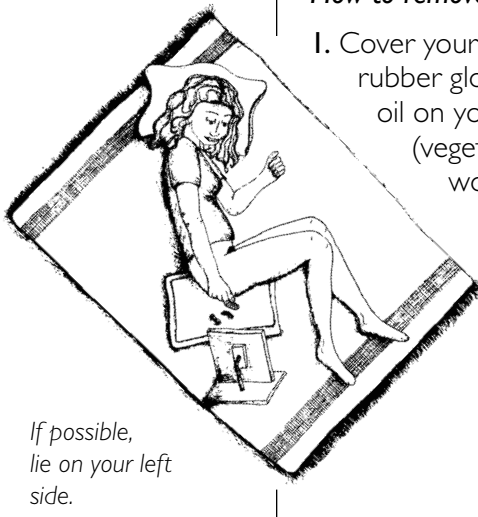
#### How to remove stool:

1. Cover your hand with a plastic or rubber glove, or a plastic bag. Put oil on your pointing (index) finger (vegetable or mineral oil both work well).



*To keep your finger clean, use a thin rubber glove, or 'fingercot', or a plastic bag.*

2. Put your oiled finger into the anus about 2 cm (1 inch). Gently move the finger in circles for about 1 minute, until the muscle relaxes and the stool pushes out.
3. If the stool does not come out by itself, remove as much as you can with your finger.
4. Clean the anus and the skin around it well, and wash your hands.



*If possible, lie on your left side.*

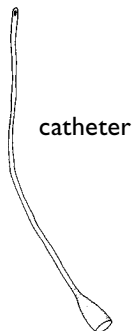
#### To prevent hard stools:

- drink lots of water every day.
- eat foods that are high in *fiber*.
- keep a regular bowel program.
- exercise or move your body every day.

### Bladder control

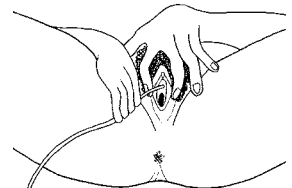
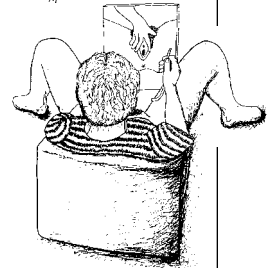
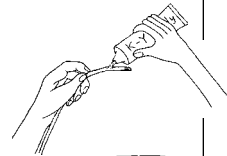
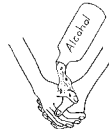
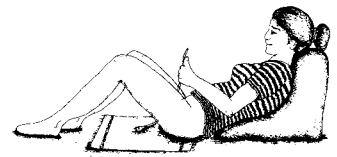
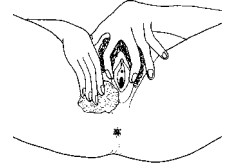
Sometimes it is necessary to remove urine from the bladder by using a rubber or plastic tube called a catheter. **Never use a catheter unless it is absolutely necessary.** Even careful use of a catheter can cause infection of the bladder and kidneys. So it should be used only if someone has a:

- very full, painful bladder and cannot pass urine.
- fistula (see page 370).
- disability or injury, and cannot feel the muscles that control passing urine.



**How to put in a catheter**

1. Wash the catheter well with clean, warm water and mild soap. Rinse well with clean, warm water.
2. Wash well with mild soap and clean water the skin around the genitals. Take care to clean the area where urine (pee) comes out and the folds of skin around it (the vulva). If you do not have mild soap, use only clean water. Strong soap can harm your skin.
3. Wash your hands. After washing, only touch things that are *sterile* or very clean.
4. Sit where your genitals are not touching anything, like on the front of a chair or on a clean toilet seat. If you sit on the ground or another solid surface, put clean cloths under and around the genitals.
5. Wash your hands again with alcohol or with mild soap and clean water, or put on sterile gloves.
6. Cover the catheter with a sterile lubricant (slippery cream) that dissolves in water (not oil or petroleum gel). It helps to protect the soft skin of the genitals and urine tube (urethra). If you do not have any lubricant, make sure the catheter is still wet from the boiled water, and be extra gentle when you put it in.
7. If you put the catheter in by yourself, use a mirror to help you see where the urinary opening is, and use your pointing (index) finger and third finger to hold the skin around the vagina open. The urinary opening is below the clitoris almost at the opening to the vagina. After you have done this a few times, you will be able to feel where the opening is and you will not need to use a mirror.
8. Then, with your middle finger, touch below your clitoris. You will feel a sort of small dent or dimple, and right below that is the urinary opening. Keep your middle finger on that spot, and with your other hand, hold the clean catheter 4 to 5 inches from the end, touch the tip to the end of your middle finger, and gently guide the catheter into the opening until urine starts to come out.



*Make sure the catheter is in a downward position so that the urine can come out.*

You will know if the catheter goes into the vagina instead of the urinary opening because it will go in easily, but no urine will come out. Also, when you remove it, the catheter will have discharge (mucus from the vagina) in it. Rinse the catheter in very clean water, and try again.

**IMPORTANT** To avoid infection when using a catheter, it is important for you to be very clean, and to use only a catheter that is very clean (see page 525). If you do get a bladder or kidney infection, talk with a health worker. You may have an infection in your vagina.