

# Patient education: Urethritis

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

## What is urethritis?

The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of the body ([figure 1](#)). Urethritis is the medical term for when the urethra gets irritated or inflamed.

People who have urethritis can have pain, burning, or stinging when they urinate. They also sometimes have discharge, meaning they leak fluid from the penis or vagina. Men with urethritis can have redness or swelling at the tip of the penis.

## What causes urethritis?

Urethritis is usually caused by an infection. The most common cause is a sexually transmitted infection. Sexually transmitted infections, often called STIs, are infections you can catch during sex.

STIs that can cause urethritis include:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Mycoplasma genitalium
- Trichomoniasis

## Should I see a doctor or nurse?

Yes. If you have symptoms of urethritis, see a doctor or nurse.

## Will I need tests?

Probably. You will probably need to give a urine sample or a sample of fluid from your vagina (if you are a woman) to be tested. If you are a man, the doctor or nurse might also take a sample from your penis. If you are a woman, the doctor might also do a pelvic exam. It's also possible you will have a blood test. These tests can show if you have an infection and what kind.

## How is urethritis treated?

Treatment usually involves taking antibiotics. If your doctor or nurse thinks you have urethritis, you will probably get treatment right away. You do not need to wait until your test results come back.

If you are treated for an STI, you should not have sex with anyone until 7 days after you start antibiotics and until you have no more symptoms.

If you learn that you have an STI, you should tell all the people you have had sex with recently. They might also be infected (even if they have no symptoms) and need treatment.

## Can urethritis be prevented?

Since urethritis is usually caused by an STI, you can reduce your chances of getting urethritis again by:

- Using a latex condom every time you have sex
- Avoiding sex when you or your partner has any symptoms that could be caused by an infection (such as itching, discharge, or pain with urination)
- Not having sex

If you had an STI at any time, your doctor or nurse might also check you for other STIs now or in the future. People can get more than one STI at the same time. Plus, STIs do not always cause symptoms, so it helps to check.