

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) Psychosis/Agitation: A Guide for Patients & Families

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are common bacterial infections that affect the urinary system, including the kidneys, bladder, and urethra. In older adults, UTIs can cause unusual symptoms such as confusion, agitation, and even psychosis. These symptoms may be mistaken for other forms of dementia or psychiatric disorders, but they are typically a result of the infection and can be treated.

Signs & Symptoms to Watch For

Common Cognitive Symptoms

- Sudden confusion or delirium
- Memory problems, especially with recent events
- Difficulty concentrating or following conversations
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there)
- Disorientation, not recognizing familiar people or places

Behavioral & Emotional Changes

- Agitation or restlessness
- Increased anxiety or fearfulness
- Paranoia or suspiciousness
- Mood swings or irritability
- Sleep disturbances, such as insomnia or excessive drowsiness

Physical Symptoms of a UTI

- Pain or burning during urination
- Frequent need to urinate, often in small amounts
- Dark, cloudy, or foul-smelling urine
- Fever or chills
- Lower abdominal pain or pressure

Typical Presentation & Progression

Early Stage

- Sudden onset of confusion or delirium, often in the evening (known as sundowning)
- Agitation or restlessness that may not seem related to the UTI
- Difficulty with memory or thinking clearly
- Mild urinary symptoms such as frequent urination or discomfort during urination

Middle Stage

- Increased confusion, often with disorientation to time and place
- Behavioral changes, such as paranoia or hallucinations
- Severe agitation, which may require sedation or medical intervention
- Physical symptoms of the UTI worsen, including fever, chills, or abdominal pain

Late Stage

- Marked confusion or complete disorientation, often unable to recognize family members or caregivers
- Severe agitation, which may involve violent or combative behavior
- Possible inability to communicate or understand others
- Full-blown infection symptoms, such as high fever, and possible need for hospitalization

Medications FDA-Approved for Cognitive Symptoms

Symptom-Targeted Medications

- There are no medications specifically approved for treating UTI-related psychosis or agitation.
- Medications may be used to manage agitation or psychosis temporarily, such as antipsychotics or sedatives.
- These medications are generally prescribed to help manage symptoms while the underlying UTI is being treated.

Disease-Modifying Therapies

- The primary treatment for UTI-related psychosis/agitation is to address the underlying infection.
- Antibiotics are used to treat the UTI, and treating the infection often leads to the resolution of cognitive and behavioral symptoms.

Diagnostic Tests Your Healthcare Team May Use

Clinical & Cognitive Evaluation

- Review of medical history, symptoms, and recent changes in behavior
- Cognitive testing to assess memory, attention, and decision-making abilities

Laboratory Tests

- Urine tests to detect the presence of bacteria and other signs of infection
- Blood tests to check for signs of infection or dehydration
- Testing to rule out other potential causes of confusion, such as electrolyte imbalances or medication interactions

Imaging Studies

- CT scans or MRIs may be used if there is concern about other causes of confusion, such as a stroke or brain injury.
- Imaging is typically not needed unless there is a need to rule out other conditions.

Planning for the Future

Healthcare Planning

- Discuss care preferences, including plans for managing future infections or changes in behavior
- Set up advance directives and healthcare power of attorney
- Consider palliative care or long-term care needs if UTI-related psychosis or agitation recurs frequently

Legal & Financial Planning

- Appoint a durable financial power of attorney
- Review long-term care insurance and other resources to support future care needs
- Consult an elder-care attorney to assist with financial planning and legal matters

Support for Caregivers

- Develop a caregiving plan that includes strategies for managing agitation and confusion
- Reach out to support groups for caregivers who are managing individuals with cognitive changes
- Ensure caregivers have access to respite care and educational resources

National Organizations & Resources

✓ ****National Institute on Aging (NIA)****

☎ 800-438-4380 | 🌐 nia.nih.gov

✓ ****National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)****

☎ 301-443-4513 | 🌐 nimh.nih.gov

✓ ****American Geriatrics Society****

☎ 800-247-4724 | 🌐 americangeriatrics.org

✓ ****Eldercare Locator****

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 eldercare.acl.gov

Final Notes

- Early identification and treatment of UTIs are essential for preventing confusion, agitation, and psychosis.
- Timely antibiotic treatment can help resolve cognitive and behavioral symptoms.
- Support for caregivers is critical, especially when managing agitation or confusion due to a UTI.