Bacterial Colonization in Urine and Symptomatic Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

Because you’re on a routine catheterization program, bacteria will be present in your urine.

Sometimes, the level of bacteria in your urine will be high, but you’ll experience no physical symptoms. Sometimes, the level will be high enough to cause physical symptoms—which means you have a symptomatic urinary tract infection (UTI).

**Why should I know the difference between high bacterial colonization in my urine and a symptomatic UTI?**

It’s important to know the difference between the two so you’re not overtreated with antibiotics.

Overtreating leads to antibiotic resistance. Even if bacterial counts are elevated in your urine, if you’re *not* experiencing physical symptoms, it’s *not* considered a symptomatic UTI, so your provider should *not* prescribe antibiotic treatment. If you *are* experiencing physical symptoms due to high bacteria levels in your urine, then you *do* have a symptomatic UTI, so antibiotics might be appropriate.

The chart below shows the differences between high bacterial colonization in your urine and a symptomatic UTI.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Bacterial Colonization in Urine</th>
<th>Symptomatic Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What Is It?</strong></td>
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<td>Bacterial colonization in urine is high when the level of bacterial counts is elevated—meaning the number of colonies of a single organism is higher than 100,000 per mL.</td>
<td>If the bacteria level in your urine is high and it’s causing physical symptoms, you have a symptomatic urinary tract infection (UTI).</td>
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<td><strong>Signs &amp; Symptoms</strong></td>
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Signs might include:

- Cloudy urine
- Increased odor of urine
- Change in color, such as when the urine becomes more concentrated and dark

Symptoms might include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Frequent, urgent and/or painful urination
- Abdominal cramping
- Increased leakage
- Increased odor
- Increased incontinence

What Should I Do?

If you notice any of the above signs, increase your fluid intake for 1 to 2 days to dilute the bacteria level.

If you notice physical symptoms of a UTI, go to your primary care provider for a urinalysis and urine culture. The culture will determine what antibiotics the bacteria are sensitive to, which will determine the best treatment for your UTI.

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