

## Alt.Health

# When peeing's a pain

Tame urinary tract infections with D-mannose and bearberry leaf

|Elizabeth Bromstein

Most women have had one, and those who haven't probably will: urinary tract infections. They suck. They're painful and, if left untreated (why anyone would do that is beyond me – how could she and it?), can lead to serious kidney problems and complications.

They are caused by E. coli bacteria that live quite comfortably in the bowel and can even hang out in the vagina without giving trouble, but when they get into the urethra, look out. As one of my experts, Dr. Harold Drutz, tells me, the trouble is anatomical: "Too many holes too close together."

You can get a urinary tract infection from too much sex, but there are less fun ways, like having a catheter.

We've all heard about the wonders of **cranberries**, but make sure that painful pee isn't caused by interstitial cystitis, a chronic condition not tied to infection that the red berry juice will only inflame. For IC, permanent dietary changes like eliminating spicy food, vinegar and red wine may be called for.

Ask your doc to take a urine culture to find out exactly what's bugging you. Are there other ways to treat these pesky problems, especially if you're prone to them and don't want to take antibiotics continually?

What the experts say

"A urinary tract infection has to be treated right away. We prescribe a homeopathic remedy specific to the person. Cranberry prevents the bacteria from adhering to the walls of the urinary tract. **D-mannose** will do the same. I might also prescribe a botanical combination with antibiotic **goldenseal** in it. I'd choose specific herbs depending on whether the urine is acidic or alkaline. Recurrent infections can be caused by a fungal infection. Women might need to boost their immune system or change their diet. **Proper flora in the vagina** is also important."

**ZORANA ROSE**, naturopath, Toronto

"**Hydration** is very important. **Antibiotics** are the mainstay. There's good evidence that cranberry works, as does **vitamin C**. The bacteria grow in an alkaline medium, and when you take these things you acidify the urine. **Blueberries** are also good. But people with interstitial cystitis have to be careful with acidic products. It's a separate condition but can have similar painful symptoms. One that distinguishes IC is consistent pelvic pain. Most women are going to have a bladder infection during their life. People should not be treated recurrently with antibiotics without having cultures taken."

**HAROLD DRUTZ**, head of urogynaecology, department of obstetrics and gynaecology, Mount Sinai Hospital, TO

"The first [strategy for dealing with a bladder infection] is to drink plenty of water. The second is to **apply alternating hot and cold compresses on the bladder area**. The third is to avoid all spicy food, alcohol, chilies, coffee and restrict intake of beans, parsley, spinach, tomatoes. We use **barley water**: soak barley in water overnight, strain and drink the water twice a day. Another remedy is 1 teaspoon **fennel seeds**, 1 tsp **coriander seeds**, 1/2 tsp **cumin seeds**. Soak overnight, strain and drink two to three times a day. Other herbs are **punarnava**, **gokshura** and **musta**. Mix together five parts punarnava, four parts gokshura and three parts musta. Take this as an herbal mixture. Most practitioners will also use **shilajit**."

**SONAL BHATT**, ayurvedic practitioner, Toronto

"To treat uncomplicated bladder infection, limit all sugars, coffee, alcohol, fats and acid-forming foods in your diet. Drink lots of water. **Empty the bladder as soon as there is an urge** to do so. My preferred herbal remedy is a cold-water infusion of **bearberry leaf** (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*). In a 1-litre jar, place 1/2 cup bearberry leaves broken into small pieces. Add enough cold water to fill up to the top of the jar. Cover and let steep for six to eight hours. Strain well and drink through the day. Another option is to add 1/4 cup **marshmallow root** (*Althaea officinalis*) broken into pieces to the above, or to make it into a separate infusion. Other choices are **luchu**, **crataeva** and **echinacea**."

**DANETTE STEELE**, herbalist, Toronto @

