SYMPTOM

Urination - painful

Painful urination is burning, stinging, or discomfort while passing urine.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Burning or stinging when urine passes

WHERE IT IS FELT
Urine opening, urethra, bladder, or lower abdomen

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Bladder infection, urethral irritation, sexually transmitted infection

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Fever with side or back pain, or inability to urinate

USUALLY LASTS
Hours to days, based on irritation or infection treatment

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Pain continues, returns, or occurs with blood or discharge

Overview

Painful urination is often called dysuria . It can feel like burning, stinging, soreness, or pressure when urine passes. The discomfort may occur only at the start or end of urination, or throughout it.

Painful urination is a symptom, not a diagnosis. It often comes from inflammation or infection in the bladder or urethra. The urethra is the tube that carries urine out of the body. Skin irritation, vaginal conditions, prostate problems, and urinary stones can also cause pain.

New or unexplained pain is worth discussing with a healthcare professional, particularly if it continues, returns, or comes with other urinary symptoms.

What it may feel or look like

The discomfort may be felt at the urine opening, along the urethra, or deeper in the lower abdomen. Some people also feel pressure in the bladder or an urgent need to urinate.

Other changes can include:

Urine can smell stronger when it is concentrated, such as after not drinking much. Odour alone

does not confirm an infection.

- Needing to urinate more often
- Passing only small amounts
- Cloudy, pink, red, or strong-smelling urine
- Lower abdominal or pelvic discomfort
- Discharge, itching, sores, or irritated skin

Common causes

Common causes include a bladder infection, also called a urinary tract infection or UTI. A UTI may cause burning, frequent urination, urgency, and lower abdominal discomfort.

The urethra or nearby skin can also become irritated by friction, sexual activity, soaps, fragranced products, spermicides, or concentrated urine. Vaginal inflammation, including yeast infection or changes after menopause, may make urine sting when it touches irritated tissue.

Sexually transmitted infections, including chlamydia and gonorrhoea, can inflame the urethra. There may also be genital discharge, bleeding between periods, pelvic discomfort, or testicular pain, but some infections cause few additional symptoms.

Less common causes include a urinary stone, prostate inflammation, bladder pain syndrome, narrowing of the urethra, or side effects from certain medicines or medical treatments. Bladder pain syndrome causes ongoing bladder pressure or pain without a typical bacterial infection.

Potentially urgent causes include a kidney infection or a blockage preventing urine from leaving the bladder. These usually cause more than mild burning alone, such as fever, side or back pain, vomiting, or inability to urinate.

When to seek medical care

Arrange same-day medical advice if painful urination occurs with:

These situations may need prompt testing and treatment.

Seek urgent emergency care if you cannot pass urine and your lower abdomen feels painful or swollen. Also get emergency help if you become confused, faint, severely weak, or have difficulty breathing.

Book an appointment if the pain continues beyond a day, keeps returning, or occurs with

visible blood, genital discharge, sores, pelvic pain, or changes in urine flow. Visible blood should be assessed even if the pain settles.

- Fever, chills, or pain in your side or back
- Nausea or vomiting that makes drinking difficult
- Pregnancy or possible pregnancy
- New testicular pain or swelling
- A weakened immune system or significant kidney disease
- Symptoms in a baby or young child

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the pain started, where it is felt, and whether you have urgency, fever, discharge, blood, pelvic symptoms, or recent sexual exposure. They may also ask about pregnancy, medicines, urinary procedures, and previous infections.

A urine sample can be checked for blood, inflammation, or bacteria. A urine culture may identify bacteria and help guide antibiotic treatment. Testing for sexually transmitted infections may use urine or a swab.

Depending on your symptoms, an examination, pregnancy test, blood tests, ultrasound, or other imaging may be needed. Repeated or unexplained symptoms sometimes require assessment by a urinary or reproductive health specialist.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. Bacterial bladder or kidney infections may need antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline . Antibiotics do not treat irritation, yeast infection, bladder pain syndrome, or every cause of painful urination. Do not use leftover antibiotics or someone else's prescription.

Sexually transmitted infections require specific treatment. Recent sexual partners may also need testing or treatment to prevent reinfection.

While arranging care, you can:

Some urinary pain-relief products can change urine to orange or red. They may ease symptoms temporarily but do not treat an infection or replace medical assessment.

- Drink enough fluid to avoid very dark urine, unless fluids are restricted
- Avoid fragranced washes, bubble baths, and other products that irritate the area
- Use gentle warmth over the lower abdomen for comfort
- Ask a pharmacist about a suitable non-prescription pain reliever

What to expect

Pain from mild irritation may improve after the trigger is removed. Symptoms from an infection often begin improving after appropriate treatment, although the exact timing depends on the cause.

Return for medical advice if symptoms worsen, do not improve as expected, or come back soon after treatment. Repeated episodes may need further urine testing or assessment for stones, bladder conditions, prostate problems, or genital irritation.

Common questions

Does painful urination always mean a UTI?

No. A UTI is common, but irritation, sexually transmitted infections, vaginal inflammation, urinary stones, and other conditions can cause similar pain.

Can dehydration cause burning?

Concentrated urine can sting irritated tissue. Drinking normally may help, but persistent pain should not be assumed to come from dehydration.

Could it be related to sex?

Friction can irritate the urine opening, and some sexually transmitted infections cause painful urination. Testing is the only reliable way to confirm or rule out many of these infections.

Should I avoid urinating because it hurts?

No. Holding urine for long periods may increase discomfort. Try to urinate when you need to, and seek care if you cannot pass urine.

Can painful urination come back after treatment?

Yes. The original infection may not have cleared, a new infection may have developed, or another condition may be causing the symptoms. Repeated pain should be reassessed rather than treated repeatedly without testing.

Sources

- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases: Bladder Infection in Adults
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