Urinary Tract Infections

Urinary tract infections are a common and often debilitating problem for many people. They are often accompanied by symptoms such as lower back pain, fever, a feeling of urgency or the need to urinate frequently, blood in the urine, or a burning sensation upon urination. Many people have the feeling of leaving the bathroom with a half-full bladder and experience a need to return in a few minutes. This incomplete emptying may be a symptom of an infection, or it may be a precursor to urinary tract problems because the urine that is left behind is an excellent breeding ground for infection. Some people experience none of the usual symptoms. Infections without symptoms are called asymptomatic infections.

Infections of the urinary tract may be located at a single site such as the kidney (pyelonephritis), the bladder (cystitis), the prostate (prostatitis), or the urethra (urethritis). Other infections are difficult to pinpoint or localize as they occur in the urine itself. Once one of the parts of the urinary tract is infected, there is a risk that the bacteria will spread to other parts of the system.

Infections are considered uncomplicated or complicated. Uncomplicated forms are those which have no underlying structural or neurological cause. Complicated varieties involve either repeated infections which have left inflammatory changes in the urinary tract system, or are those associated with an obstruction or stones which interfere with the drainage of urine.

Most urinary tract infections (commonly called UTI’s) begin by bacteria entering the system from the outside of the body which travel up the urinary tract system (ascending infections). It is possible, though less common, for infections to travel to the kidneys in the blood and descend down the system.

Many people question their doctor as to whether they have done wrong to cause an infection. Usually the answer is that they haven’t done anything, but simply that some people are more susceptible to infection than others. However, to help you decrease the risk of having a urinary tract infection, we would suggest the following:

For women:
1. Do not wear tight pants which can irritate vaginal tissue leaving it more vulnerable to infection.
2. Be cautious about your use of sprays, douches and bubble baths. They may also cause irritation.
3. Wipe from front to back after urinating to avoid contamination by bacteria from the rectum.
4. Empty the bladder completely before and after intercourse.
5. Wear cotton underwear instead of nylon to allow for better air circulation.
6. Avoid using colored toilet paper as the dye may be irritating to some people.

For both men and women:
1. Drink plenty of fluids, six to eight glasses each day.
2. Be sure to empty the bladder completely once every four hours.

These suggestions may reduce the possibility of having to deal with a painful bladder infection. However, always see your doctor immediately at the first signs of infection. Never begin self-medication assuming that a repeat infection is being caused by the same bacteria as your previous infection. Only by culturing the urine can a correct identification of the culprit bacteria be made and an appropriate medication prescribed. Even two infections occurring immediately one right after the other in the same individual may be caused by different bacteria.

Culturing the urine is usually a painless procedure for the patient. For most people, a reliable specimen of urine can be collected by urinating while employing increased precautions for cleanliness. If the patient cannot void spontaneously, or is too ill or immobilized, a physician can collect a specimen by inserting a catheter into the bladder or using other means of collection.

When your doctor or nurse asks you for a urine specimen, they will give you a kit which has supplies to thoroughly clean the penis or vaginal area, and a sterile collection cup. Be sure to hold the cup by the outside. If you should inadvertently touch the inside or drop the cup, ask the nurse for a new one in order to avoid accidental contamination.

If you are asked to give a urine specimen at home, be sure to take it to the laboratory immediately. If there is an unexpected delay, refrigerate the sample to retard bacteria growth. This is important because one of the jobs of the laboratory is to determine the number of bacteria found in your urine. After finding a bacteria count, the technician will then identify the bacteria which is causing the infection and test several medications to see which works best. This test helps your physician to determine which antibiotic will be most effective in fighting the infection.

Unless there are complicating factors, most physicians will begin treating the infection once the laboratory reports are received. Since the aim of therapy is to eliminate the infecting bacteria from all parts of the urinary tract system, it is unlikely that further evaluation to localize the exact site of the infection will be necessary.

Be sure to inform your physician if you are currently taking any medications, and also if you are aware of any allergies to antibiotics you have exhibited in the past. When your pharmacist is filling your prescription, you might also want to ask him/her if there are any foods or medications you should not have while taking this prescription. Do not take the medication for the amount of days recommended by your doctor and then return to your physician for another urinalysis. Many people experience a relief of symptoms shortly after beginning treatment, and thus are tempted not to follow through with either the medication or follow-up office visit. Remember that the lack of symptoms can be deceptive. Only with laboratory evaluation of your urine can you and your physician be sure that the infection has been cured.
One Voice: An Editorial

“The times, they are a changin’...” proclaimed a popular ballad of the 1960’s. Today, that very thing could be said about incontinence as the long list of people coming out of the closet (see Pen Pals article this issue) can attest. Just a few short years ago, people who wrote to the Foundation constantly reminded us: “please don’t print my name” or “please don’t send me anything that says incontinence on the envelope, I don’t want my spouse to know.” In reminiscing about the good (?) old days, one of our staff members remembered the kindly Hollywood doctor who, having been inspired by reading our book Managing Incontinence: A Guide to Living With the Loss of Bladder Control, called to offer his help. He had many famous patients who suffered from incontinence and he wanted our permission to invite them to be interviewed for an article in The Informer. To a person, they all reacted with a resounding NO, one of them breaking into tears for fear that his name had already been divulged.

“But that was yesterday, and yesterday’s gone” was another popular ballad verse. Today, a famous movie star promotes incontinence products in television commercials, a long list of Simon members want pen pals, and just yesterday, this author saw a gift mug at the corner pharmacy which read: “You know you are over the hill when your head reflects better than your mirror, your bladder leaks, and...” Granted, we might all agree that some of the ways in which incontinence is filtering into the public consciousness may not be ideal, but even imperfect publicity can lead to an opportunity for betterment of our lives. For instance, a recent radio promotion for an upcoming segment of the television show “48 Hours” featured a program on the state of homelessness in America. The publicity asserted that

“when you are living on the street you feel lower than urine.” Frankly, I’m not entirely sure what this statement communicates, but I do know that the next time a Foundation spokesperson is doing a TV or radio talk show where the host cautions that the use of such words will be prohibited, we will refer him to Dan Rather.

When I look back over all that has been done, I am reminded of a favorite saying of my old high school coach who admonished: “Lead, follow, or get out of the way.” Which path will you choose Mr. Doctor, Mr. Nurse, Mr. Manufacturer, or Mr. Person with incontinence? We could enter the twenty-first century with the problems of incontinence behind us if we all chose to lead.

LEAD Mr. Doctor... ask your patients if they have any bowel or bladder leakage, sponsor physician education programs in your community, talk to your local media and urge coverage about cure and treatment. LEAD Mr. Nurse... start self-help groups in your community, take continuing education courses in this field and become an expert so that you can teach others. LEAD Mr. Manufacturer... design a leak proof incontinence product so that people with incontinence can sleep through the night, make products which will fit children, and reduce the costs so that these products are affordable for all who need them. LEAD Mr. Person with incontinence... take charge of your life and set an example, tell others about the help and hope available to them, give a gift subscription of The Informer to your local library or to your physician for his or her office waiting room, and give your money to research for cures.

No matter how encouraging the changes have been, curing incontinence and the disabling attitudes surrounding it in our society, still leaves room for a great deal of leadership.

Simon Says...

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION which might be of interest to some of our readers is the Everest and Jennings Company’s Avenues catalog. Featured in the catalog are fashion wardrobes and versatile separates designed and tailored to provide greater independence for wheel-chair users. Call or write to them for your own copy: Everest and Jennings Avenues, 3233 East Mission Oaks Boulevard, Camarillo, California 93010.

MANY THANKS to all of the delightful folks across America who wrote a note of thanks to the Simon Foundation’s Volunteer of the Year. Your humorous and touching cards were deeply appreciated.

HANDICAPPED PARKING. If you, or someone you know, are often frustrated finding cars illegally parked in a space designated for disabled parking, you may be interested in contacting Schwab Rehabilitation Center, attention: Public Relations Department, 1401 South California Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois 60608 to secure several of their parking reminder notices. Designed to slip under windshield wipers like a parking ticket, the notice reads: “You are parked in a space reserved for the disabled. Your future cooperation will be appreciated by those individuals who require these reserved spaces.” These polite reminders will hopefully help to leave these spaces available to all who truly need them.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS. We don’t want you to miss a single issue of The Informer, but we need your help. When you send us your new address, please remember to indicate your old address also. Remember, that’s the way we find you on the computer. Your membership I.D. number, located on the mailing label of this Informer would also be of great help.

THE PROSTATE BOOK by Stephen Rous, M.D. may answer many of the questions our male readers have about prostate problems and what to expect when considering surgery. Chapters include: Normal Anatomy and Normal Function; How the Doctor Diagnoses Your Problems; Infection and Inflammation in the Prostate Gland (and the Prostatic Urthra); Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia; Cancer of the Prostate; Surgical Procedures and Radiation Therapy; What You (the Patient) Can Anticipate at Each Step Along the Way; and Complications of Prostate Surgery. If you can’t find it in your bookstore (retail price $18.95) or local library, you might try writing the publisher: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110.

REQUEST FOR MEMBERSHIP

Yes, I would like to be a member of the Simon Foundation for Continence.

Please mail to me the Foundation’s quarterly newsletter, The Informer. Enclosed is $15.00 for my membership. I understand that all mailings will come to me in an unidentified envelope.

Contributions and membership in the Simon Foundation are tax deductible.

NOTE: Your annual membership will begin with the next edition of The Informer.

Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
City ____________________________ State _______ Zip Code _____________
Pen Pals

Several years ago the Simon Foundation introduced our version of the American YUPPI (Young Urban Professional), which we dubbed IPPY for Incontinent Pen Pals Yakkering. Needless to say we were deluged with all types of requests including notes from people who were spouse hunting. Our faithful volunteers began jokingly threatening the President with a walkout, being a bit overwhelmed by requirements for diligent and time consuming attempts to match people with their pen pal preferences. The immense matching task is the reason why longtime readers of The Informer have not seen any recent articles proclaiming the merits of our pen pal club!

But recently, one of our readers had a stellar suggestion. “Why not list everyone who is willing to be a pen pal in The Informer from time to time,” he asked. Not only did this suggestion meet with a resounding cheer from the staff, but with an enthusiastic response from our readers. The following is a list of people who wish to correspond and make friends with others who are living with incontinence.

The individuals who have added their names to this list gave varying reasons for wanting pen pals. Some did not state their reason. So please do remember that it is not possible for the Foundation to screen participants in our pen pal club although we have every reason to believe that all who wish to join do so with the motive of self-help.

So, for all of you who wanted us to play matchmaker, happy hunting!

Janet M. Rochon
1263 Robinson Ave. #16
San Diego, CA 92103

Jean Davis
P.O. Box 41360
Pasadena, CA 91104-360

Robert C. Merriam
319 Cabrillo Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95065

John J. Phalen
405-307 Upper Wentworth Street
Hamilton, Ontario L9A 4T2 Canada

Mike Boyar
1977 Salem Road
Union, N.J. 07083

Ms. Esther Walters
816 E. Colton Avenue
Redlands, CA 92374

Joe McGee
P.O. Box 81302
Seattle, WA 98121-6302

Gary Weaver
1204 Thomas Jacobs Pl.
Brandon, FL 33511

G.F. Richard
Box 445
Huntington P.R.

Terry R. Filebark
4622 Barrington Road
Plymouth, MI 48170

Robert P. Collins
P.O. Box 2134
Claremore, OK 74017

Bryan T. Carpenter
10715 S.W. 14th Avenue Drive
Miami, FL 33196

Call or Write for Your Free Sample

We would like you to try Serenity Guards, free of charge. To receive your free sample pack of three Regular or Super Serenity Guards, call our toll-free number, 1-800-962-1129, Ext. 304, or write to: Johnson & Johnson, PO. Box 5234, Clifton, NJ, 07015. Please specify Regular or Super absorbency. (Serenity is currently available in the eastern half of the U.S. and we will send your sample promptly. Requests from the western half of the U.S. will be honored in 1980 when Serenity is available nationally.) Limit one per household.

Call or write today!
Letters to the Editor

Dear Simon Foundation:

This letter may help someone who has just become incontinent. My husband was incontinent for more than 5 years and he handled it all beautifully. At first, he only wanted to stay home because he thought he couldn't handle it, but with coaxing he bought some incontinence products and a pair of adult rubber pants. He was not sure how to carry an extra set in case he needed it but found a case for music (he played the organ and sometimes carried his music to play at friend's homes). This case was not as large as a brief case and at first everyone asked him what he was selling? He said, "Oh, didn't you know that I'm now selling insurance?" Soon all of our friends knew about his incontinence and would kid him about the case he carried and would say—"How much insurance did you sell today?"

He was always careful if we went to a restaurant, country club, or any public place, to be sure to check where the men's rooms were, and if they had one with a door on for privacy. Most did. We never missed an invitation to anything and he never worried as his protection was good. We had five good years of living even with his incontinence. He was 90 when he passed away. I hope this helps some couple in need of encouragement.

Florida

Dear Friend:

What a beautiful letter. It sounds like you had many more than five good years of living in your marriage. We often say that attitude is the real disability. A letter such as yours points out that a positive attitude is the real ability.

Dear Mrs. Gartley:

As a result of my letter published in the Winter, 1988 Issue of "The Informer," I have received many letters and even a few phone calls from people with bed-wetting problems. Some suffered from enuresis, others experienced total urinary incontinence. All were concerned, sympathetic, and anxious to help those with similar problems. It would be a shame not to share some of the concerns, feelings and observations expressed by these thoughtful people.

Overall, it is becoming increasingly evident that bedwetting is far more common than I previously thought. The real figures may never be known because of the attendant stigma and the ease of concealment. The most frequently cited problem mentioned was the shame they were saddled with because they wet their beds past the age when most children were dry. Punishment and ridicule by family members frequently led to a feeling of rejection and resultant depression. Guilt frequently led to despair. A lack of understanding of the problem created misery which haunts many people, even though they are now in their 60's.

Some were devastated by the invasion of privacy they suffered while undergoing seemingly endless and futile examinations, testing, and catheterization. One described his feelings about the fact that the public perceptions of enuretics is that they are little, immature people; babies that are not in control of themselves. Another mentioned that since nothing was apparently, or outwardly physically wrong, they must be emotionally immature, lazy or incompetent. Still another voiced concern for youngsters and teenagers having to cope. At this most challenging time in life, how do you tell someone of the opposite sex you have to wear diapers to bed every night?

Many had problems finding suitable protection products, but one other theme running through all the letters was the apparent need to communicate with others cursed with the same problem and experiences. And, herein lies the problem. The stigma attached to enuresis has long sealed their lips in self defense. Fear of exposure dogs them continually. Unfortunately, most of their fears are well founded since even our relatively enlightened society may not yet be ready to accept a condition that we have been taught for a lifetime is shameful or disgusting.

Dealing with problems of this sort has to start somewhere, and perhaps the best place is to learn to talk (or correspond) with others who face similar problems. Since the public at large may not be ready to accept bed-wetting as a condition often beyond control, an organization like the Simon Foundation is ideal since it allows for privacy to those who desire it. You may use my name and address if you wish.

C.M. Beckwith
13205 S.W. 100 Place
Miami, FL 33176

Dear Mr. Beckwith:

Your letter tells the story far better than I could and explains why our Pen Pal club is something everyone who is struggling with incontinence should consider joining. Thank you for taking the time to share what you are learning once again with all our readers.

Reprint Series

If you've been an Informer reader for just a short time you may have missed an article which would be valuable to you. The Simon Foundation Reprint Series may be just what you need. Titles currently available:

Reprint No. 1: "ADVANCED AGE NOT A CAUSE FOR INCONTINENCE"

Reprint No. 2: "FINDING AN INCONTINENCE PRODUCT TO SUIT YOUR NEEDS"

Reprint No. 3: "URINARY INCONTINENCE—ROLE OF THE ENLARGED PROSTATE IN THE OLDER MAN"

Reprint No. 4: "CLEAN INTERMITTENT CATHETERIZATION FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF INCONTINENCE"

Reprint No. 5: "OPERATIONS FOR THE TREATMENT OF GENUINE STRESS INCONTINENCE IN FEMALE PATIENTS" and "RIEGEL EXERCISES" (This is one reprint)

Reprint No. 7: "ARE YOU READY TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT INCONTINENCE?"

Reprint No. 8: "THE LAST OF THE CLOSET ISSUES"—Time Magazine and "THOSE EMBARRASSING AILMENTS: HERE’S HELP!"—Good Housekeeping (These two articles are considered one reprint).

Reprint No. 9: "NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH CONSENSUS DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE STATEMENT: URINARY INCONTINENCE IN ADULTS"

To order reprint articles, send $1.00 per article ($2.00 for Reprint No. 9) with a business-size self-addressed stamped envelope to: REPRINTS, The Simon Foundation Box 835-R, Wilmette, Illinois 60091