



KATIE BRINDLE

## Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) Guide

Treatment techniques Rooted in Chinese Wisdom



# Overview

From a Western medical perspective, Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs) are infections in any part of the urinary system, including the Kidneys, Bladder, urethra (the tube which allows urination), and ureters (the tubes that connect the Bladder and the Kidneys). Most infections involve the lower urinary tract, the Bladder and the urethra. Women are at greater risk of UTIs than men. The primary cause is usually bacterial, especially E. coli, and symptoms include a strong, persistent urge to urinate, a burning sensation when urinating and cloudy urine. In Chinese Medicine, UTIs are often associated with an imbalance in the body's Yin and Yang energies, leading to the invasion of external pathogenic factors such as Dampness and Heat, or an internal condition such as Kidney Yin deficiency. These imbalances disrupt the proper flow of Qi which can affect the Bladder's function in efficiently removing waste and regulating fluids.

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# Causes

- **Damp-Heat in the Bladder:** This is the most common Chinese Medicine diagnosis for UTIs. Dampness refers to a pathogenic factor that causes feelings of heaviness, stickiness and stagnation in the body, whilst Heat bring inflammation, infection and burning. Symptoms typically include a stinging or burning sensation during urination, dark, cloudy, or strong-smelling urine and a feeling of incomplete emptying of the Bladder. This pathogen often arises from an imbalance in the body's fluids, due to poor dietary habits (such as excessive consumption of spicy, greasy, or sweet foods), external Heat, or internal factors such as stress or anger.
- **Cold-Damp Accumulation:** Less common than Damp-Heat, this condition involves an excess of Cold and Damp qualities in the body. Symptoms are usually less intense than Damp-Heat and can include frequent urination of clear urine and a feeling of coldness. There is generally no burning sensation. This cause results from exposure to cold and damp environments, dietary factors, or an inherent weakness in the body's Yang energy.
- **Kidney Yin Deficiency:** In Chinese Medicine the Kidneys are not just excretory organs but are fundamental to all the body's Yin and Yang energies. Yin deficiency means a lack of cooling, nourishing fluids in the body which can create a false type of Heat in the body, known as Empty Heat, which may affect the Bladder, leading to UTI symptoms. Kidney Yin deficiency will present issues such as night sweats, dry mouth and a deep, chronic ache in the lower back.
- **Qi Deficiency:** Qi is our vital life force, so if it experiences any deficiency it can result in a weakened state of the overall body, including the Bladder, and lead to a predisposition towards UTI's and a failure to properly control urination. Symptoms of Qi deficiency might include frequent urination, a feeling of tiredness and a pale complexion.

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- Liver Qi Stagnation: The Liver is responsible for the smooth flow of Qi and blood throughout the body, so if there is Liver Qi stagnation, it can create Heat elsewhere in the body, including the Bladder, contributing to UTIs. Stress, frustration and unexpressed emotions are often the root causes of Liver Qi stagnation and Liver Heat.
- Wei Qi Deficiency: Wei Qi, or defensive Qi, acts as the body's protective energy or shield, similar to the immune system. Compromised Wei Qi can cause the body to become more vulnerable to external pathogenic factors such as Damp-Heat, Cold-Damp or Wind-Heat, leading to the occurrence of UTIs. Factors that can affect the strength of our Wei Qi are stress, poor diet, inadequate exercise and imbalances within the organ function, most notably the Lungs and the Kidneys.

## Organs Implicated

- Bladder: The Bladder is responsible for storing and excreting urine, so has a direct bearing on the incidence of UTIs. When a pathogen, such as Damp-Heat, invades the Bladder, it disrupts its function, leading to symptoms such as stinging and burning on urination, as well as frequency and urgency. The Bladder is the Yang organ pairing to the Yin Kidney, so an imbalance in the Kidneys will have a direct impact on Bladder health.
- Kidneys: The Kidneys are the organs associated with the element of Water. They play a crucial role in maintaining the body's overall balance of fundamental Yin and Yang energies, as well as water metabolism and the transformation of fluids. Weakness in Kidney Qi, especially Kidney Yin deficiency, can lead to a form of false Heat, known as Empty Heat, that may ascend to the Bladder, leading to inadequate control of urination and contributing to the development of UTIs. The emotional aspect of the Kidneys, fear, especially if chronic, can also weaken Kidney Qi which, by association, will impact the Bladder.

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- Spleen: The Spleen is closely linked to the digestive system and the transformation of food and fluids into Qi and blood. If the Spleen function is compromised, it can lead to the accumulation of Dampness or Phlegm which, when combined with external pathogenic factors, in the case of UTIs Heat, can create Damp-Heat in the Bladder, leading to symptoms such as cloudy urine and a heavy sensation in the lower abdomen. If negative emotions, such as worry or overthinking, are allowed become entrenched, this will weaken the Spleen further, contributing to even greater Dampness and more severe or long-term UTIs.
- Liver: A balanced Liver will ensure the smooth flow of Qi and Blood throughout the body. However, Liver Qi stagnation, often due to stress, frustration or unexpressed anger, can generate Heat. It is this Heat that, over time, can affect the Bladder, contributing to the formation of UTIs and exacerbating the symptoms. Additionally, Liver Qi stagnation can negatively impact the Spleen, leading to Dampness which, especially in combination with Heat, can cause UTIs.
- Lungs: The Lungs are the organs most involved in Wei Qi distribution, the defensive energy that protects the body from external pathogenic factors. If the Lungs are weak, it can lead to a deficiency in Wei Qi, reducing the body's natural ability to fend off harmful pathogens, such as Damp-Heat, which is so prevalent in the formation of UTIs. Efficient Lung function, therefore, will help to ensure the smooth flow of Qi flow, which is essential for the health of all the organs, including the Bladder.

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# Emotions

Chronic emotional stress can severely disrupt the flow of Qi in the body. Each organ has specific negative emotions attached to it which, if left unresolved, can manifest as physical problems:

- **Fear (Kidneys):** Fear is the emotion most closely associated with the negative feelings of the Kidneys. As the Kidneys are the “Root of Life”, holding our pre-natal essence, this fear may be deeply rooted. Chronic fear can severely weaken Kidney Qi, leading to imbalances such as Kidney Yin deficiency that contribute to the development of Heat, which will then ascend to the Bladder and manifest as a UTI. Harmonious Kidneys, with balanced emotions, are therefore crucial for maintaining the healthy Kidney function that is essential in regulating the urinary system and staving off UTIs.
- **Worry and Overthinking (Spleen):** The Spleen is affected by emotions such as worry, overthinking and pensiveness. It is this excessive worrying that can impair Spleen function, leading to the production of Dampness which, in combination with Heat, creates the perfect environment for UTIs to flourish. Addressing and managing these emotions is vital for the health of the Spleen, and consequently, preventing the accumulation of Dampness.
- **Anger and Frustration (Liver):** The Liver is associated with the emotions of anger, frustration, and irritability. Unresolved anger or chronic frustration can lead to Liver Qi stagnation and it is this stagnation that can generate Heat, disrupting the other organs of the body, including the Spleen and Bladder, which will potentially lead to UTI symptoms. Maintaining emotional harmony is key to ensuring the smooth flow of Liver Qi, thereby reducing the risk of Heat accumulation and its effects on the urinary system.

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# Acupressure

Acupressure is a technique that can easily be performed as part of your self-care practices. Gentle pressure is applied to specific points on the body with fingers or an acupressure tool to help clear blockages in the meridians, the pathways of the body through which Qi flows.

## REN-3 (Zhōngjí):

Location: On the midline of the lower abdomen, four finger-widths below the belly button and one finger-width above the pubic bone.

Why: REN-3 is directly over the Bladder and is renowned for its effectiveness in treating urinary concerns as it can help to regulate the Bladder, fortify the Kidney, clear Damp-Heat and harmonise the flow of Qi in the lower abdominal area. Gently apply steady pressure for 2-3 minutes daily.

## SP-9 (Yīnlíngquán):

Location: On the inner leg, just below the knee in the depression of the lower border of the bony prominence (medial condyle) of the tibia.

Why: This is a key point for resolving Dampness in the body, it is especially effective for symptoms related to Damp-Heat UTIs, such as painful urination.

## KID-3 (Tàixī)

Location: This point is located on the inner side of the foot. Find the highest point of the inner ankle, and then slide your finger down into the depression between the ankle bone and the Achilles tendon.

Why: As the source point of the Kidneys, KID-3 will strengthen the organs, specifically nourish Kidney Yin, thereby helping to clear Heat which will be beneficial when treating and preventing UTIs.

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### BL-28 (Pángguāngshū):

Location: Found on the lower back, two finger widths away from the spine, at the level of the second sacral vertebra.

Why: This is the Bladder's back-shu point and is effective for all Bladder-related issues, particularly helpful for clearing Heat and regulating urination. Gently press the area with the fingertips or thumbs and palpate for two or three minutes.

### LIV-3 (Tàichōng)

Location: Found on the top of the foot, in the fleshy webbing between the big toe and the second toe, approximately two thumb-widths from the edge of the webbing.

Why: One of the most useful points for smoothing Liver Qi, reducing stress and frustration and regulating the free flow of Qi in the body. Stimulating this point can alleviate all stagnation-related symptoms, including those of UTIs.

## Yang Sheng Practices

There are many practices, lifestyle choices, self-care tools and supplements that can be used to help manage the symptoms and the root cause of UTIs, including:

- Qigong: Qigong is a practice that combines gentle movements, breathing techniques and meditation to cultivate and balance the body's Qi. Movements that focus on the lower abdomen and Kidney area will help strengthen the Kidneys and Bladder to improve urinary function, whilst the deep breathing will help to promote circulation, reduce stress and support overall health, assisting in managing symptoms of UTIs and preventing future outbreaks.

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- Gua sha: A time-honoured and traditional Chinese therapy involving gently press-stroking the skin with a smooth-edged tool to promote blood circulation and remove Heat and stagnation. Gua sha applied to the lower abdomen and lower back will help to stimulate the flow of Qi and blood in the urinary tract area, which can relieve pain, reduce inflammation and support the body's natural healing processes.
- Dietary Adjustments: Mindful dietary choices can play a crucial role in maintaining health and preventing imbalances in the body. For UTIs, focus on foods that are nourishing and easily digestible so as not to overburden the Spleen, and include items that have diuretic properties to further support urinary health. Avoid spicy, greasy and processed foods as these can contribute to Dampness and Heat in the body, instead opt for water-rich fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Include foods that have a cooling and detoxifying effect too, such as watermelon (in the Summer only), cucumber, celery and dandelion greens. Avoid anything straight from the fridge as this will tax an already burdened Spleen.
- Hydration: Staying hydrated is crucial for maintaining urinary tract health. Drink plenty of high quality filtered water to help flush out bacteria and toxins, reducing the risk of UTIs. Helpful teas include:
  - Dandelion tea for its diuretic properties, which can help increase urine production and flush out bacteria from the urinary tract. It also has anti-inflammatory properties that can help reduce inflammation.
  - Green tea for its antioxidants and polyphenols that have been shown to have antibacterial properties which will support the Kidneys and Bladder, reducing the risk of UTIs.
  - Hibiscus tea for its diuretic properties, as well as compounds that may help inhibit the growth of bacteria in the urinary tract.

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- **Stress Management:** Stress can weaken the immune system, allowing the body to become more susceptible to infections. Engaging in stress-reducing activities such as meditation, deep breathing exercises and relaxation techniques such as walking in nature, can help support overall health, thereby reducing the risk of the stagnation, Dampness and Heat that contributes to the risk of UTIs.
- **Lifestyle Adjustments:** Making certain lifestyle changes can also help prevent and manage UTIs. These include:
  - Wearing loose-fitting, breathable clothing and underwear to promote air circulation and reduce trapped moisture in the genital area.
  - Avoiding irritants that may disrupt the delicate balance of the natural bacteria in the urinary tract, such as harsh soaps and feminine hygiene products.
  - Urinating before and after sexual activity to help flush out bacteria.
  - Wiping from front to back after using the lavatory, can help prevent the spread of bacteria and reduce the risk of UTIs.
  - Emptying the bladder regularly, rather than holding urine for long periods can help to prevent the growth of bacteria.

## Useful Supplements

There are many helpful supplements that can be taken as both preventative self-care and to alleviate symptoms of UTIs, these include:

- **Cranberry Extract:** In Chinese Medicine, cranberries are considered to move Qi and clear Heat, whilst helping to prevent bacteria from adhering to the Bladder wall. This will be invaluable in both treating the symptoms of UTIs and reducing the frequency of recurrent attacks.

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- Dandelion Root (Pú Gōng Yīng): Known for its ability to clear Damp-Heat and promote urination, this herb will support the Bladder and Kidney function, helping to flush out toxins and reduce the pain and inflammation associated with UTIs.
- Corn Silk (Yù Mǐ Xù): Known for its ability to soothe and tonify the Bladder, Corn Silk also has a mildly diuretic ability, helping to reduce inflammation and promote healing of the urinary tract.
- Medicinal Mushrooms: Shiitake mushrooms possess antimicrobial properties that can support the health of the Bladder and Kidneys as well as the immune system generally. Turkey Tail will also enhance overall wellbeing by restoring a healthy environment in the gut due to its many beneficial probiotics. Cordyceps can enhance Kidney health and also have anti-inflammatory and immune-strengthening benefits, further supporting the body in the management of UTIs.
- D-Mannose: A natural sugar found in fruits such as cranberries, peaches and apples, is often used as a powerful remedy for UTIs by preventing bacteria from adhering to the urinary tract walls, allowing it to be flushed away efficiently, thereby reducing the risk of infection. It is known to be effective in treating most UTIs, with a particular benefit to those UTIs resulting from E. coli.

## Conclusion

Addressing Urinary Tract Infections using Chinese Medicine principles will provide a holistic approach, focusing on balancing physical, emotional and lifestyle factors. Yang Sheng practices such as qigong, gua sha and acupuncture, along with dietary adjustments and the mindful use of supplements such as D-mannose and medicinal mushrooms will play a crucial role in promoting urinary health, managing UTI symptoms and preventing future attacks by maintaining harmony and balance within the body.

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# Want to know more?

We will be delighted to support you as you continue along your Yang Sheng journey.

The following will get you started:

'Yang Sheng: The Art of Chinese Self-Healing' available on Amazon, Waterstone and [www.hayoumethod.com](http://www.hayoumethod.com)

Buy Yang Sheng Book

Healing Movement classes (3 x each week) and live meditations for a more in-depth and healing practice – full details [here](#)

Free Masterclass "[Master Your Health](#)" – understand the 3- step plan for preventative health. Find more Healing Masterclasses [here](#).

Free self-care weekly content [@katiebrindle](#) on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

Free regular gua sha demonstrations on [@thehayoumethod](#) Instagram & the opportunity to purchase the accompanying tools from [www.hayoumethod.com](http://www.hayoumethod.com)

## DISCLAIMER:

Please note that any of these Yang Sheng techniques are designed to support your overall self-care and wellbeing and should not be used as a substitute for any Western medical advice or treatment that you may be receiving. You should not use the information in this Guide or on our website for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease and must always consult your doctor if you have any health concerns. Additionally, please note that there are a few contraindications to Yang Sheng techniques, so please visit [www.hayoumethod.com](http://www.hayoumethod.com) to view our comprehensive FAQs.

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