



"I'M IN SO MUCH PAIN – MY BLADDER FEELS CLOSE TO BURSTING"



Jacqui Dixon, 35, an administrator, has suffered from recurring urinary tract infections since she was a teenager. She lives in London with her fiancé Tim.

"I've suffered from urine infections (UTIs) for what seems like a lifetime and regularly take days off work as I'm in so much pain – my bladder feels close to bursting and there's terrible burning when I try to pass water. The most annoying aspect is that people often assume a UTI is a sexually transmitted disease or that I have an overactive sex life! It's true that symptoms can be aggravated by frequent sex, but I tend to get infections when I'm working long hours and am overtired. Antibiotics work fairly quickly and I relieve the symptoms by drinking lots of water to flush out the infection. I also carry sachets of sodium citrate in my bag (such as Cymalon, £3.99 for six sachets), as they neutralise the acidity in my urine, which prevents the burning sensation when I pee."

abnormal or heavy periods, painful intercourse, or frequent urinating (when a fibroid presses on the bladder). But a fibroid can become troublesome if it grows into the uterine cavity, where it can cause infertility. **TREATMENT:** Your GP can detect fibroids with a pelvic examination or a pelvic ultrasound. Eighty per cent of women with fibroids have no symptoms and don't need treatment, but if you're experiencing heavy period bleeding, the Pill may help. The Fibroid Embolisation: Information, Support & Advice organisation (FEmISA) reports that many women who contact them are concerned that they have only been offered a hysterectomy as treatment for severe fibroid tumours. However, the

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has set guidelines that women with fibroid tumours larger than 3cm should also be offered a myomectomy (where the fibroids are scraped or burned away) or non-surgical fibroid embolisation (where, under local anaesthetic, a micro catheter is introduced into the blood vessels supplying the uterus), thereby removing the fibroids – so invasive treatment is not the only option available.

• Visit femisa.org.uk for more information.

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

WHAT ARE THEY? Bacteria that live on the skin around the vagina and anus (yours and your partner's) sometimes ascend the urethra during intercourse and cause a urinary tract infection (UTI). Those with active sex lives tend to suffer from UTIs more frequently, as sex increases the chances of infection. Spermicides (like nonoxynol-9), which are often used in combination with condoms, can also disturb the normal vaginal flora, creating a perfect environment for bacteria and thereby aggravating the symptoms.

SYMPTOMS: A frequent and/or urgent need to urinate and a burning sensation when passing urine, pain in the lower abdomen and a mild fever. Pain in your lower back or cloudy, bad-smelling urine may also indicate a urinary tract infection.

TREATMENT: A course of antibiotics. To help keep your urinary tract free from bacteria, you should pass water straight after intercourse and always wipe from front to back. Wear breathable cotton underwear – synthetic materials trap heat and moisture, creating an ideal breeding environment for bacteria. Drinking two to three cups of unsweetened cranberry juice a day can also help, as research suggests that the antioxidants in cranberries decrease the bacteria's ability to adhere to the bladder lining. Finally, stay hydrated – you'll pass water more often and so flush bacteria from your urinary tract.

POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME

WHAT IS IT? An endocrine disorder linked to high levels of androgens (male hormones). It affects one in 10 women in their reproductive years and is usually diagnosed in their twenties and thirties.

SYMPTOMS: Infrequent, irregular or absent periods, acne, depression, ovarian cysts, obesity, thinning hair on your head, increased facial and body hair. Polycystic

ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is the most common cause of female infertility.

TREATMENT: PCOS can't be cured, but it can be treated. You'll need to have a physical examination, blood tests and an ultrasound to confirm the diagnosis. Your GP may then prescribe the Pill to help regulate your cycle and reduce androgen levels. Maintaining a healthy weight is also key, since fat tissue elevates hormone levels. If you are trying to conceive, fertility drugs can help normalise ovulation.

• Verity is the UK charity for women with PCOS. Visit verity-pcos.org.uk for more information.

YEAST INFECTIONS OR THRUSH

WHAT ARE THEY? Thrush is caused by a yeast infection in the vagina and affects 75 per cent of women at some point. Many factors can contribute, including stress, antibiotics, taking the Pill and pregnancy. **SYMPTOMS:** Vaginal itching, excess and thicker discharge and painful urination.

TREATMENT: Over-the-counter anti-fungal treatments such as Canesten (available orally or as pessaries or cream) may be all you need. However, these treatments may not be specifically formulated to treat the type of yeast causing your symptoms and should not be used in the long term without first seeking medical advice. Yeast infections can be hard to distinguish from bacterial vaginosis, so if your symptoms don't clear up within a week, or if you have repeat infections, see your GP.

LACK OF LIBIDO

WHAT IS IT? Loss of sex drive, which can occur as a result of hormonal changes, the menopause, stress, ill health or emotional issues. Each person's sex drive is very different – although, typically, women tend not to feel as much desire as men and find it more difficult to orgasm.

TREATMENT: "An effective libido-boosting herb is Rhodiola (£9.65 for 30 tablets, solgar.co.uk)," says medical nutritionist Naomi Beinart. "It's been used in Russia for centuries. Patients usually notice results within three to four days. It's also known to help improve your mood by increasing the feel-good chemicals in your body, which are essential to achieve a healthy sex life." Improving your diet can also help. Pumpkin seeds and nuts, such as almonds and brazils, contain the amino acid arginine, which is known as a 'natural Viagra' as it boosts blood flow to the genital area.

• Visit sda.uk.net or contact the Sexual Dysfunction Association on 0870 774 3571. **SHE**