Script – Broadcast – Understanding Urinary Tract Infections
A Common Problem That Could Turn Deadly

Former President Bill Clinton was in the news recently when it was revealed that he had experienced a urinary tract infection (UTI) that eventually spread to his bloodstream.

According to the Urology Care Foundation, UTIs are quite common. They result in more than eight million doctor visits annually. UTIs are more common in women; half of all women will experience at least one UTI during their lifetime. But men, especially older men, are also likely candidates to experience UTIs.

SOT: Dr. Mirza Ali Khan, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare

"UTI is basically when you have bacteria that shouldn't be in the bladder or in the area of the urinary stream. When that bacteria gets there, it stays there and starts growing and that eventually leads to a urinary tract infection that we normally see." (:15)

The symptoms of UTIs tend to come on suddenly and include:

- Painful urination and a burning sensation
- Needing to urinate frequently
- Sudden urges to empty your bladder
- Pain in the lower abdomen
- Blood in your urine

According to Dr. Khan, most UTI's are caused by E. coli, which is naturally present in the body. He says that women are more likely to have UTIs because of their anatomy. Their urethra is shorter and the bacteria need to travel a shorter distance to reach the bladder. Women who've experienced multiple vaginal births can develop incontinence, which can also lead to UTIs, adds Dr. Khan.

And the opening of a woman's urethra is near the anus and birth canal, two common areas where bacteria lives. Dr. Khan stresses the importance of women wiping from "front to back" when using the bathroom, which reduces the chance of spreading the bacteria from the anus to the urethra.

Another possible cause of infection is kidney stones. If they block the tube that connects the kidney to the bladder, urine can't pass out of the body, which increases the chance of UTIs.

SOT: Dr. Mirza Ali Khan, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare

"If you get a kidney stone that causes the bacteria to stay there and cause an infection. Other things, if men are getting reoccurring UTIs, you need to check if something is going on with the urinary tract system you have to do imaging to make sure there is no blockage of any sort. Sometimes people can have a stricture that is just the way their urinary tract is and it's narrow and doesn't empty as well and leads to infection. Anything that causes the urine to become stagnant, aside from the fact you're introducing a bacteria that shouldn't be there, puts one at risk for developing a urinary tract infection." (:38)

Antibiotics can usually clear up UTIs within three to five days. If it's not treated, however, it can enter the bloodstream and cause sepsis, which is the body's response to an infection or injury.

SOT: Dr. Mirza Ali Khan, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare

"It could potentially spread up into the kidneys and from there into the bloodstream potentially and that's what causes sepsis, which is when you have bacteria that gets into the bloodstream. That under any circumstance could become potentially life-threatening so you need to make sure you're on top of that if there is something else going on."(:16)

To prevent UTIs, Dr. Khan recommends drinking plenty of fluids, emptying your bladder as frequently as possible, and remembering to wipe 'front to back.'

Recurring UTIs are rare unless you have a more serious issue.

SOT: Dr. Mirza Ali Khan, Family Practice Physician, OSF HealthCare

"If it's a simple UTI and you treat it, it's usually taken care of. If it keeps coming back you have to do more workups to see what's causing it. Is it a chronic condition like diabetes, do you have a history of kidney stones, things like that. You have to do a workup to see what's causing it over and over again." (:17)

The biggest takeaway message is to listen to your body. If you notice anything unusual, make an appointment with your doctor.

For more information on UTIs, please visit OSF HealthCare.