

Urethritis and Urethral Discharge in Men

If you have a urethral discharge, you are likely to have a sexually transmitted disease, which you can pass on. See a doctor, even if symptoms go.

The urethra is the tube between the bladder and the end of the penis. Urethritis means inflammation of the urethra.

What are the causes of urethritis?

Urethritis is usually caused by a sexually transmitted infection. It is classed into two types.

- **Gonococcal urethritis** if the cause is gonorrhoea. This is one type of sexually transmitted infection. A separate leaflet describes gonorrhoea in more detail.
- **Non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU)** if it is caused by anything other than gonorrhoea. This is sometimes called non-specific urethritis (NSU). A bacterium called chlamydia is the common cause of NGU. This is one type of sexually transmitted infection. NGU can also be caused by a variety of other bacteria or viruses (bugs). NGU may rarely have a non-infective cause. For example, injury or surgery to the urethra can cause inflammation. A separate leaflet describes NGU in more detail.

Some men have a combination of gonococcal and non-gonococcal urethritis at the same time.

What are the symptoms of urethritis?

- A discharge (fluid) from the end of the penis is common, but does not always occur.
- Pain or burning when passing urine. This may be confused with a urine infection.
- There may be irritation of the penis, or a feeling of wanting to pass urine frequently.
- About 1 in 10 men with an infected urethra never develop any symptoms.

How does urethritis progress?

Symptoms usually clear over time in most men even without treatment. This may take from 2 weeks to 6 months. However, the infection still remains in most men. It is just the symptoms that may go. **You are still likely to be infectious and can still pass on the infection even if**

symptoms go. The bacteria that cause urethritis in men can cause serious problems in women.

What should I do if I have symptoms of urethritis?

- Don't ignore it. See a doctor, even if symptoms go.
- Your doctor may do tests or refer you to a genito-urinary clinic. Tests such as a sample taken with a cotton wool swab and a urine test are usual to find out the cause of the symptoms.
- Antibiotics will usually clear the infection. The antibiotic prescribed depends on the cause.
- Tell your sexual partner to see their doctor too even if they have no symptoms. Many women with sexually transmitted infections do not have symptoms at first.
- Don't have sex until tests and treatment are completed in you and your sexual partner.