

UTIs and Menopause

53-year old Megan catches up with a former co-worker for lunch...

Megan:

"I have to sit near the bathroom. When I have to pee, it comes on so suddenly. And, do you know I got my first UTI last year too and then bam... suddenly they become the norm for me."

Greta:

"I used to get them all the time when I was young and then they started again when I turned 50. Sam and I were in Bermuda celebrating our anniversary last month and that was my welcome home gift."

Whether you're currently going through menopause or have already experienced "the change" this conversation on urinary issues may sound all too familiar. (Whoever named menopause "the change" never mentioned it actually involves a whole LOT of changes!) The hot flashes, weight gain and sleepless nights at the start were probably expected, but the surprises that come later would test any woman's patience. Surprise, you're now getting UTIs and the pain, burning and urgency that come with them.

What's happening?

UTIs develop when bacteria (most commonly E. coli) get into the urinary tract and take up residence there. While the bacteria ideally would be washed away in your urine, sometimes this isn't the case and, instead, they attach to the bladder wall and grow into an infection.

Why?

While UTIs can occur in women of all ages, the risk increases after menopause, even in women who have never had one before. There are several physical changes that occur in women as they age that increase their risk for UTIs.

These include:

- **Decrease in estrogen.** This makes the urinary tract susceptible to infection. It can also lead to vaginal atrophy (thinning of the vaginal wall), dryness and inflammation that increase UTI risk.
- **Uterine prolapse.** The pelvic floor muscles are stretched so the uterus drops onto the bladder, making urinating more difficult and infrequent.
- **Sexual intercourse.** Bacteria around the vaginal area and anus gets pushed into the urinary tract.

Anyone who has experienced a UTI knows it's not a laughing matter. If left untreated, UTIs can cause more serious issues. It's important to understand why they are happening so you can take steps to prevent them!