What is a Urinary Tract Infection?
A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection anywhere in the urinary system, from the kidney to the urethral meatus (opening of the tube that carries urine from the bladder to outside the body). The most common pathway for infection is believed to be an ascending route, in which bacteria at the urethral opening travel upward to the rest of the urinary tract. UTIs are some of the most common bacterial infections, affecting 150 million people a year. UTIs are more common in females due to the anatomical position of the urethral opening (close proximity to the vagina and rectum) which allows bacteria to travel more easily into the urinary tract.

What are Common Symptoms of a UTI?
Although the following symptoms may be experienced to varying degrees, it is not unlikely for symptoms to go unnoticed.

- Burning or pain when urinating
- Passing frequent small amounts of urine
- Strong, persistent urge to urinate
- A feeling of incomplete emptying of the bladder
- Urine that is cloudy or bloody (pink or red)
- Strong smelling urine
- Feeling achy
- Pain in the abdomen or back
- Fever (usually low-grade temperature; chills, back pain, and high-grade fever when the infection is at kidney level)
- Poor urinary stream (usually in men)

How is a UTI Diagnosed?
A urinalysis is used to determine if an infection is present. This procedure tests for white blood cells in a clean-catch urine sample. A high number of white blood cells can indicate an infection, thus a culture may be performed. Results of the culture may not be available for 48 hours.
How is a UTI Treated?
The method of treatment prescribed is based on test results, however antibiotics are used to cure a UTI. Medication should be taken as prescribed; failure to follow instructions can result in a reoccurrence due to the bacteria not being completely destroyed. Alcoholic beverages may decrease the effectiveness of antibiotics and should not be consumed while taking medication.

If a UTI does not respond to treatment or if UTIs are experienced frequently, one may be referred to a doctor that specializes in the urinary system.

How can UTIs be Avoided?
1. Limit the consumption of caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, and soda. Caffeine irritates the urinary tract lining.

2. Drink plenty of water, at least 8 glasses (64 oz) of water a day. Drinking cranberry (sweetened with juice, not sugar) and/or orange juice everyday will help keep urine pH more acidic, which may help prohibit bacterial growth.

3. Practice good bathroom hygiene. Wipe from front to back after using the toilet. This will help reduce the movement of bacteria from the rectum to the urethra. Change feminine pads frequently during menses.

4. Urinate frequently and when needed. Try to empty the bladder as completely as possible. Do not hold urine in.

5. Urinate before and after intercourse. This flushes bacteria from the bladder. Wash the genital area with baby wipes or soap and warm water before and after intercourse. Use water-based lubricants, natural or artificial (e.g., KY jelly), during intercourse; lubrication helps minimize friction that may irritate the urethral opening.

6. Take showers instead of baths. Baths can allow bacteria to travel from the rectum or vagina to the urinary tract.

For More Information Contact the OU Health Services’ Nurse Line at 325-8732.

Types of urinary tract infection:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Part of Urinary Tract</th>
<th>Signs &amp; Symptoms</th>
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| Kidneys (acute pyelonephritis) | • Upper back and side pain  
• High fever  
• Shaking and chills  
• Nausea  
• Vomiting | • National Kidney and Urological Diseases Information Clearinghouse  
• WebMD |
| Bladder (cystitis) | • Pelvic Pressure  
• Lower abdomen discomfort  
• Frequent, painful urination  
• Blood in urine | |
| Urethra (urethritis) | • Burning with urination  
• Difficulty starting urination  
• Feeling frequent or urgent need to urinate  
• Discharge | |