Urinary tract infection, otherwise known as “UTI”, can afflict women and men alike, though because of anatomical differences, women have far more UTIs than men. Urinary tract infections account for over 8 million visits to the doctor each year, and are the second most commonly treated infection, right after upper respiratory lung infections.

Infections of the urinary tract can be a frustrating, recurring problem.

Consider this: almost 20 percent of women who have a urinary tract infection will likely have another, and 30 percent of that group will have yet another UTI. In fact, of that 30 percent, 80 percent of women will have recurrences. For some women, these infections can occur several times a year!

A further complication is the overuse of antibiotics, the usual medical treatment for these kinds of infections. Because of this overuse, we now have antibiotic resistant bacteria that can take up residence in the urinary tract and are extremely difficult to eradicate! And while we often think of UTIs as an uncomfortable nuisance, for people with a weakened immune system, these infections can spread, cause permanent kidney damage, or even be lethal.

Fortunately, there are safe and effective natural medicines that can both treat and prevent urinary tract infections, which is the subject of this week’s Terry Talks Nutrition.

Women and Men are Both Affected

The reason you’ll see women mentioned more often than men concerning UTIs is because a woman’s urethra, (the tube connecting the bladder with the outside of the body) is much shorter than a man’s. This means that harmful bacteria do not have as far to travel in order to get into the bladder. Also, since the anus and the urethra are in closer proximity in women, there is an additional chance for contamination.

However, men are not immune. In fact, they’re especially vulnerable if they have an enlarged prostate. The obstruction of the urethra that prevents proper emptying of the bladder can boost the chances of infection, too. This can be quite common in older men.

With most conventional doctors, treating urinary tract infections and cystitis (inflammation of the bladder) often means pulling out the prescription pad to order antibiotics and painkillers. As mentioned before, overuse of antibiotics have created resistant bacteria that are very difficult to treat, and anti-inflammatory pain drugs like ibuprofen and naproxen sodium actually reduce kidney function – not a good thing at all with a UTI!

Cystitis can accompany urinary tract infections, but can show up as a condition of its own. Similarly, inflammation in the kidneys – nephritis – can occur as a complication of UTI treatment, caused by antibacterial drugs. But it too, can crop up simply because of the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), or diuretics prescribed for high blood pressure. It affects the body’s ability to filter and remove waste, so it can add another serious layer of difficulties to an already stressful condition.

Botanical Ingredients for Urinary Tract Infections

Let’s look at two botanicals that offer a natural solution for this common problem. One of them includes the polyphenols and organic acids of hibiscus (Hibiscus sabdariffa). Hibiscus is native to India and Malaysia; the plant can grow up to 8 feet tall and has bright yellow flowers and bud-shaped red fruits that are used as dessert fillings and teas. It is high in vitamin C, and has been prescribed for colds and for healthy arteries. But considerable evidence shows that the components of this remarkable ingredient can prevent urinary tract infections.

In one double-blind, placebo-controlled study, hibiscus cut the incidence of urinary tract infections by 77%! The study included 90 women from 18 to 55 years old having more than eight episodes of urinary tract infections per year, so these were serious cases. Since this was a six month study, that means the average woman went from about 4 infections in that time period down to one – or in some cases, none. This study was conducted with a very specific premium grade aqueous preparation of Hibiscus sabdariffa. In addition to its immune effects, this special hibiscus contained compounds which researchers believe acidify the urine and protect against urinary infections as well as kidney disorders (formation of stones).

As a natural therapy for cystitis, Hibiscus sabdariffa also contains compounds that inhibit and prevent the adhesion of E. coli – the bacterial cause of 80-95% of the episodes of acute cystitis. Hibiscus

Key Words

urinary tract infection, UTI, cystitis, urethra, bladder, kidney, hibiscus, cranberry, urination, urine, genitourinary tract, urine retention, prostatitis, benign prostatic hyperplasia, BPH

When in doubt, always consult your physician or health care practitioner. This column is to provide you with information to maintain your health.

To your good health,

Terry... Naturally

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houses these compounds – polyphenols, flavonoids, anthocyanins, and chlorogenic acids – in the calyx, a structure that holds the flowering part of the plant. In fact, these compounds possess excellent antimicrobial activity against Staphylococcus, Bacillus subtilis and Pseudomonas aeruginosa as well as E. coli. In fact, the activity of these natural compounds is similar to the antibacterial drug, chloramphenicol, but without the serious side effects.

Cranberry – Traditionally Recognized Relief
Cranberry (Vaccinium macrocarpon) was a food source and a medicine for Native Americans who introduced the plant to European settlers. Men aboard whaling ships from New England ate cranberries to prevent scurvy while they were away for long periods at sea.

Closer to our own time, most people now recognize cranberry as being an excellent botanical to prevent and treat urinary tract infections. That’s because over a century of research combined with traditional use has shown it to be one of the most remarkable ingredients available.

Cranberry is rich in healthful compounds, like proanthocyanidins, that prevent E. coli (and other harmful bacteria) from adhering to the lining of the bladder and urethra. This anti-adherence power is what really gives a good cranberry extract its risk-decreasing punch. It is also excellent at suppressing Helicobacter pylori infections – a bacteria we typically associate with ulcers.

While cranberry probably does its best work as a preventive herbal, combining it with hibiscus enhances its anti-adherence power for treatment. Plus, taking a high-quality standardized extract provides a much more accurate dosage, without the sugars of cranberry juice. Just one dose of this combination can help you prevent urinary tract infections, and provides you with a natural treatment as well.

Other Steps You Can Take:
Habits and lifestyle can make a difference. There are steps you can take to reduce the risk of urinary tract infections and keep them from recurring.

• Make sure you drink plenty of water every day – not just when you feel really thirsty.
• Visit the bathroom when you feel the need – your body sends you those signals for a reason.

Terry recommends a urinary tract formula with these ingredients. Look for it at your local health food store.

Proprietary Complex 700 mg
Hibiscus (Hibiscus sabdariffa) Extract (25:1), Cranberry (Vaccinium macrocarpon) Extract (4:1), Cranberry (Vaccinium macrocarpon) Extract 30% proanthocyanidins

Other Things to Keep in Mind:
The risk of urinary tract infection is increased in people with kidney stones, spinal cord injury, suppressed immune systems, such as AIDS and diabetes, or others who take immunosuppressant medications. People who have greater levels of sexual activity tend to have higher rates of UTIs. However, urinating immediately after intercourse appears to reduce the risk of urinary tract infection, since that flushes bacteria away from the opening of the urethra. Women who also use a diaphragm for birth control are at greater risk. And while men typically don’t experience urinary tract infections as often as women, circumcised males are at greater risk than uncircumcised males. Hospitalized patients, and patients in nursing homes, can experience UTIs more frequently, especially if they have a temporary or permanent urinary catheter (a tube that drains urine from the body into a collection bag). If you fall into a higher risk category, you may want to use a potent combination of hibiscus and cranberry every day.

For some populations, urinary tract infections are not common, such as very young infants and children. In that case, you should not treat with natural alternatives without first consulting a physician, to determine any underlying problem.

In fact, whatever route to treatment you take, always seek the advice of your physician to make sure you have a urinary tract infection and not some other problem. Urinary tract infections should not be taken lightly and left untreated. They can cause major complications and should always be treated. However, I do believe that this combination of hibiscus and cranberry is extremely effective, and you may want to discuss with your health care practitioner using this blend as your initial intervention and then monitor symptom improvement. If you are concerned about being at risk for urinary tract infections, or have had one in the past and would like to prevent a recurrence, these strong herbal ingredients should be a part of your daily regimen.