

# Asymptomatic Bacteriuria

WARWIKI

Patient Information · Bacteria in the urine when you feel completely fine

Asymptomatic bacteriuria means a urine test found **bacteria in your urine, but you have no urinary symptoms** — no burning, urgency, pain, or fever. This is common, especially in older adults, and in most people it is **not an infection that needs treatment**. This sheet explains why your team may decide **not** to give antibiotics.

## What It Means

Urine is not perfectly sterile, and harmless bacteria can live in the bladder without causing trouble. Finding them on a test, by itself, does **not** mean you are sick. It becomes a **urinary tract infection (UTI)** only when it causes **symptoms** — such as burning, urgency, new pain, or fever.

## Why We Usually Don't Treat It

Major medical guidelines advise **against** antibiotics for bacteria found without symptoms, because treating it:

- Does **not** make you feel better (you already feel well)
- Exposes you to antibiotic **side effects** (rash, upset stomach, *C. difficile* diarrhea)
- Drives **antibiotic resistance**, making future infections harder to treat

So a “positive” urine test in someone who feels fine is usually best left alone and simply watched.

## LEARN THE TERMS

### Asymptomatic

Without any symptoms.

### Bacteriuria

Bacteria present in the urine.

### UTI

A urinary tract infection — bacteria *plus* symptoms.

### Urine culture

A test that grows bacteria from a urine sample.

### Antibiotic resistance

When bacteria adapt and antibiotics stop working.

### Watchful waiting

Monitoring instead of treating, when treatment isn't needed.

**SO WHY WAS MY URINE TESTED?** Sometimes urine is checked for another reason, or a test is ordered before symptoms are clear. If it shows bacteria but you feel fine, your team is following the evidence by holding antibiotics — not by ignoring you. There are a few specific times when treatment *is* recommended.

## When It IS Treated

There are important exceptions where antibiotics **are** recommended even without symptoms:

- **Pregnancy** — treating it protects you and the pregnancy.
- **Before certain urologic procedures** that are expected to cause bleeding in the urinary tract.

Outside of these, watchful waiting is the safe, recommended path. Cloudy or strong-smelling urine alone, without other symptoms, is **not** a reason for antibiotics.

## What to Watch For

Treatment is based on **symptoms**, so know the signs that it has become a true UTI:

- New **burning** or pain when urinating
- New **urgency or frequency**
- **Fever, chills, or back/flank pain**

## Good to Know

- In older adults, confusion alone is often **not** from a UTI — other causes should be checked first.
- If you have a catheter, some bacteria are expected and are not treated unless you have symptoms.
- Keep up normal habits: drink fluids and don't hold urine for long.

### Call your team if you develop:

- Burning, urgency, or new pelvic or lower-belly pain
- **Fever, chills, or back/flank pain**
- Visible **blood in the urine**

## THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Bacteria in the urine **without symptoms** is common and usually **not** treated — that's the safe, evidence-based choice.
2. Treating it doesn't help you feel better and can cause side effects and antibiotic resistance.
3. The exceptions are pregnancy and before certain urologic procedures. Call if you develop burning, fever, or flank pain — that may be a real UTI.