



# Overactive Bladder and Urinary Tract Infections: Tips to Easily Spot the Difference

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## Overactive Bladder vs UTI

So many physical health symptoms create more mystery than certainty. Does the symptom indicate this condition or that condition? Is this something to worry about, or is it only a common part of getting older?

When a confusing group of symptoms confronts you, it's important to look at the facts about how you're feeling. By doing this, you can separate one condition from the others.

Consider conditions like overactive bladder (OAB) and urinary tract infection (UTI). Because of their similarities, these conditions are often confused for one another.

### OAB Basics

Overactive bladder is a condition marked by the sudden urge to urinate. In many cases, the person with OAB will rush to the bathroom, but in other settings, they will be unable to reach the facilities in time and have the involuntary loss of urine, also called urge incontinence.

The primary symptoms of OAB include:

- Sudden and unexpected urges to urinate
- Urge incontinence that follows a strong urge to urinate
- Urinating eight or more times daily
- Needing to urinate two or more times during the night

OAB results from a loss of bladder function and involuntary bladder contractions. These contractions stem from or are linked to multiple sources like:

- Excessive alcohol or caffeine use
- Urinary tract infections
- Cognitive decline
- Enlarged prostate
- Diabetes
- Stroke
- Alzheimer's
- Sleep problems
- Sexual issues

Depression and anxiety share a bidirectional relationship with OAB. OAB often makes mental health issues worse, as it increases someone's stress and worry about making it to a bathroom in time. Meanwhile, mental

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health issues often make OAB worse, as anxiety is linked to frequent urination.

## **UTI Basics**

As the name suggests, a urinary tract infection is a bacterial infection occurring somewhere along the urinary tract, which includes the kidneys, bladder, ureters and urethra. Most UTIs are located in the bladder.

Although anyone can get them, women get UTIs about 30 times more than men do. Additionally, when a woman gets a UTI, she is much more likely to get another within six months.

Having a UTI involves a range of symptoms like:

- Pain or a burning sensation when urinating
- Pressure or a heavy feeling in the lower abdomen
- An unusual smell or appearance of the urine
- Blood in the urine
- Feeling weak, tired or shaky
- Having a fever caused by the infection
- A strong urge to urinate
- Urinating more often

Since it is an infection, bacteria are normally the cause of UTIs. So, you might be wondering, "how do you get a UTI?" Some people are at greater risk of developing UTIs, including:

- Sexually active people
- Women who use spermicides or a diaphragm for birth control
- Pregnant women
- Post-menopausal women
- People who have diabetes
- Anyone with another condition that affects the urinary tract, like kidney stones
- Those with a catheter

Though problematic and uncomfortable, UTIs are usually short-lived and quickly resolved with proper diagnosis and treatment from a medical professional.

## **OAB and UTI Overlap**

At this point, it becomes easy to see where the overactive bladder vs UTI confusion comes from. Both of these conditions have the distinct ability to significantly impact the normal functioning of the urinary tract.

OAB results in the strong urge to urinate, an urge that may end with urge incontinence. A UTI also results in the strong urge to urinate and causes a person to urinate more often than normal, so how can someone tell the difference between the two?

This problem can be complicated, and a thorough assessment from a medical professional is always advised. Your doctor can determine the actual cause of the symptoms by asking questions like:

- How long have these symptoms lasted? UTIs are generally short in duration, while OAB can last indefinitely.
- Has the urine changed in smell or appearance? With UTIs, the urine smells bad and could have a milky consistency, but it remains unchanged with OAB.
- Do you have a fever? As an infection, UTIs commonly bring fevers, unlike OAB.
- Have you recently encountered other medical or mental health issues? Learning about the complete health picture can offer insights into the actual diagnosis.

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A proper diagnosis is essential to relieve symptoms.

### **Overactive Bladder vs UTI Treatments**

Treatments vary by condition and how much the condition is currently impacting the individual's health and well-being. Compared to OAB, the treatment for a UTI is simple and straightforward. In most situations, antibiotic treatment is enough to leave the person feeling better in just a few days.

OAB is slightly more complicated, with a range of treatment options.

**Behavioral interventions:** a number of lifestyle changes like exercising the pelvic floor, working to maintain a healthy weight, scheduling visits to the bathroom, catheterization and training the bladder.

**Medications:** various medications are used for OAB. Be sure to check with your doctor for options.

**Injections:** Botox, a drug most recognized for smoothing facial lines, is used to paralyze muscles around the bladder.

**Nerve stimulation:** by stimulating the nerves around the bladder, this process can regulate messages sent to the bladder.

**Surgery:** for people with severe symptoms, surgery can enlarge the bladder or remove it completely.

OAB and UTIs are two medical conditions that share some symptoms, which may confuse diagnosis and treatment. For the best outcome, anyone questioning their health should consult with a trusted physician to understand the source of their frequent urination.