



Bladder and Kidney Problems

Natural Help for Urinary Inflammation, Infection and Irritation

The urinary system is responsible for filtering the blood to remove toxins, acid waste and excess fluid. The kidneys also help maintain the balance of mineral electrolytes like sodium and potassium in the body.

Because of their role in removing irritants from the body, the organs of the urinary system may become irritated and inflamed, resulting in various diseases of the urinary tract. Many urinary disorders are named for the site of inflammation, which is indicated by the Latin suffix, *itis*. When the inflammation is in the urethra (the tube that empties the bladder), you have *urethritis*. When it is present in the bladder itself you have *cystitis*. When it moves to the kidneys you have *nephritis*.

Inflammation of the bladder can cause the bladder to become irritated, so that a person feels a continual need to urinate, even when only small amounts of urine are present. Chronic inflammation can also weaken the sphincter muscle at the bottom of the bladder, causing the bladder to leak, a problem known as incontinence. Inflammation can also cause burning and pain.

These inflammatory states may involve infection, but infection does not have to be present to have these symptoms. Urinary tract infections (UTIs) are most common in women, but also occur in men. They are typically caused by bacteria from the colon (such as *E. coli*) which migrate up the urethra into the bladder where they attach themselves to the bladder wall and begin to multiply.

Fortunately, nature provides many herbal remedies that can help to reduce inflammation in the urinary tract, reduce irritation, eliminate infection, improve kidney function and tone weakened tissues (such as the sphincter muscle). But before discussing any herbal remedies for urinary problems, we need to stress the most important remedy for almost all urinary problems—water.

Most people simply do not drink enough water to properly dilute the toxins the kidneys are trying to eliminate. As a result, the concentration of toxins in the urine is excessive and causes inflammation and irritation to the urinary tissues and structures. The irritation weakens these tissues, causing them to become more susceptible to infection.

It may be difficult to convince yourself to drink more water when you are suffering from incontinence or irritable bladder, or when urination is burning or painful, but this is exactly what the body usually needs. Pure water is needed to dilute irritants and help the body flush them out. While you may make an uncomfortable number of trips to the bathroom for a few days, drinking more pure water will ultimately speed healing.

Soda pop, fruit juices, milk and coffee do not substitute for water. In fact, soda pop and coffee are very hard on the kidneys and should be avoided completely when one is suffering from urinary problems. Small amounts of herbal or green tea are OK, but should not be considered substitutes for consuming water.

To help the urinary system flush toxins effectively, herbal remedies can be selected that will support healing. The best remedies will depend on the nature of the symptoms.

Where frequent urinary tract infections are a problem, unsweetened cranberry juice has long been recognized as a valuable remedy. Cranberries help prevent bacteria from adhering to the urinary passages, thus preventing urinary tract infections as well as keeping them from spreading. The combination of Cranberry and Buchu is valuable for urinary tract infections, too. Buchu acts as a diuretic to help flush bacteria from the urinary system. This formula works best when taken regularly to prevent infections.

When there is an active infection in the bladder or urinary passages, other remedies can be taken to speed recovery. These include goldenseal, uva ursi or Goldenseal/Parthenium. Both goldenseal and parthenium act as urinary antiseptics, making this combination a good choice for infections.

In most cases, Uva Ursi is probably the best urinary antiseptic available. It contains arbutin and other hydroquinone glycosides, which become disinfectant in the urinary passages. Unlike cranberry, Uva Ursi works better in alkaline urine. Uva Ursi also can help tone the bladder and sphincter muscle to help with incontinence and bed-wetting. Uva Ursi is not as effective in capsule form as it is when taken as a tea. Use 2-3 capsules per cup of boiling water and drink about 1/2 to 1 cup per day.

When the bladder is irritated or urination is painful or burning, soothing remedies are needed. These remedies are also useful when there is inflammation in the kidneys (nephritis). Soothing remedies include cornsilk, marshmallow or Urinary Maintenance. The cooling, anti-inflammatory effects of Thai-Go would also make that formula useful for irritable bladder or urinary tract inflammation where there is heat or burning. In these situations involving irritation, burning or pain, juniper berry, uva ursi, Kidney Activator and other stimulating diuretics are usually contraindicated.

Other urinary tract remedies include Chinese Kidney Activator and Kidney Drainage Formula. To help you design a program that is right for you, talk to your local herb specialist. His or her name should appear below.

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