



## **Natural Remedies for** Edema, Urinary Tract Infections, Interstitial Cystitis, Incontinence, Kidney Stones and Other Urinary Problems

If you haven't thought much about urinary health you're not alone. Most people don't think about this important bodily function until they have a problem. But, a lot of people do have issues with the urinary system. Common problems include urinary tract infections (UTIs), interstitial cystitis, kidney stones, incontinence, prostatitis, and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

In fact, UTIs are the most common infections in the world and are particularly problematic for women. They account for about 25% of all infections in women and about 50% of all women have reported having UTIs during the previous 12 months.

Interstitial cystitis, also called painful bladder syndrome, is another major problem. This debilitating condition affects an estimated 3.3 million American women.

The more common urinary problems in men are prostatitis and BPH, which cause pain and difficulty urinating in about 1.6 million men.

Another painful and difficult problem people experience with the urinary system is kidney stones. It's been estimated that 1 in 11 people in the United States have problems with kidney stones.

The most serious of all urinary problems is chronic kidney disease, which results in failure of the kidneys to function properly. About one in seven Americans will have this problem, which tends to get worse over time. Ultimately, about 2 in 1,000 Americans will wind up with end-stage kidney disease, which requires kidney dialysis and may require a kidney transplant.

However, not all urinary problems are this obvious. Moderate urinary dysfunction can underlie many other health issues, including blood pressure, mineral imbalances, weakness of the bones and joints, osteoporosis, and more.

If you're one of the millions of people suffering from health problems directly or indirectly related to the urinary system, this issue of *Sunshine Sharing* is for you. In it we'll discuss the role of the urinary system in overall health, the various health problems associated with the urinary system, and how to use herbs and other natural remedies to restore urinary health.

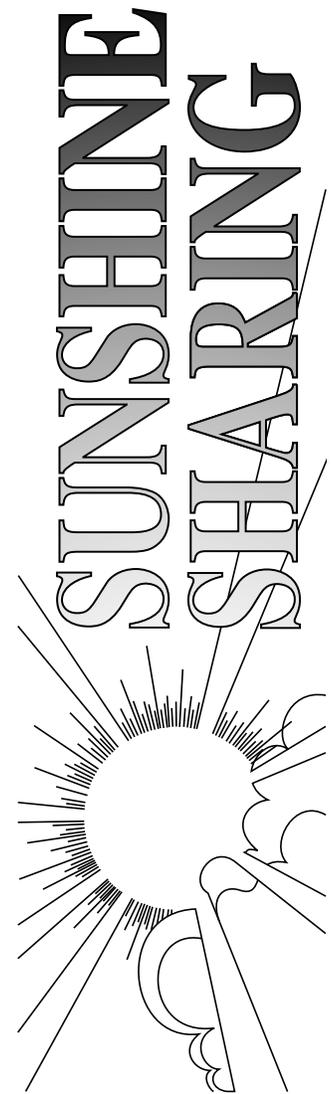
## **Basic Urinary Health**

Two of the most important things you can do to improve any urinary system problem is to drink enough pure water and balance your body's pH levels. So, if you're experiencing any urinary health problems start by making sure you're properly hydrated and alkalized.

Most people don't drink enough water. They drink coffee, tea, soda, energy drinks, fruit juice, milk, alcohol, and other beverages instead. However, when it comes to the health of the urinary system, most of these beverages aren't going to help kidney function. Many, in fact, cause stress on the urinary system because they increase the acid load the kidneys must filter. This is particularly true of sodas and energy drinks, which are very acidifying.

It's been said that "the solution to the pollution is dilution," and drinking at least 6-8 cups of water daily is important for good health. That's about one and a half to two quarts a day. If you're a larger person, live in a hot, dry climate, or are exposed to a lot of chemicals you will need more. The most important key to determining if you're drinking enough water is urine color, which should be a pale-yellow color. If your urine is darker, you need to drink more water.

**Continued on page 2**



**Your guide to better health the natural way.**

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### **Important Notice**

The information in *Sunshine Sharing* is for educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose and treat diseases. If you have a health problem, we recommend you consult a competent health practitioner before embarking on any course of treatment.

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## Continued from page one

There is one exception to this rule. Certain nutrients, like B-vitamins, will color the urine bright yellow if you take them. Even then, however, you should try to drink enough water to keep your urine a lighter color.

It also helps to adopt a more alkaline diet, which involves eating a diet containing a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables and a minimal amount of grains and sugars. Too much animal protein can also be acidifying.

### Urinary Health and the Structural System

If your body's pH starts becoming too acidic due to a lack of water, an overly acidic diet, or poor kidney function, it will adversely affect the structural system. The body will borrow alkaline minerals like potassium, magnesium, and calcium from bones and other tissues. This results in a loss of mineral reserves, the tendency to develop kidney stones, and a weakening of the structural system.

This helps us to understand why traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) claims that the kidneys build the bones. Their ability to flush acid helps retain the mineral reserves needed for healthy tissues. Thus, problems like gout, osteoporosis, arthritis, back pain, and weakness in the legs, knees, and ankles may be at least partly caused by a deficiency of kidney qi (energy).

### Other Urinary System Functions

In TCM the kidneys are considered the home of the life essence or jing. According to TCM, a deficiency of jing shortens one's life, making the kidney energy foundational to reducing the effects of aging. This is probably due to the close proximity of the kidneys and the adrenal glands, which help the body cope with stress.

It may also explain why excessive fear is thought to deplete kidney energy in both Oriental and Western tradition. Fear causes stress on the body that contributes to more rapid aging processes as well as a loss of urinary function. Anger may also affect the bladder which is why we talk about an angry person being "pissed off," suggesting that anger shuts down urinary function.

## Common Urinary Problems

With this background, we're ready to tackle how to deal with various urinary problems using natural remedies. Here are some common urinary problems and how to resolve them.

### Edema

One of the obvious problems that can arise from poor kidney function is water retention, also called edema. The symptoms of edema are fairly obvious—swollen ankles, feet, hands and puffiness under the eyes. If you suffer from chronic edema, first get a medical checkup to determine the cause, as water retention can be a sign of congestive heart failure and other serious diseases.

If the problem is kidney related, herbal diuretics can be used in place of diuretic drugs to help promote better kidney



function and reduce edema. This is one situation where herbs can actually work better than drugs. Potassium is important for healthy kidney function, but diuretic drugs tend to deplete potassium levels, while many herbal diuretics supply potassium.

### Selecting Diuretic Herbs

There are two basic kinds of herbal diuretics, those that stimulate the kidney to produce more urine, and those that help to tone the kidneys and improve their function. Stimulant diuretics include juniper berry, buchu, and uva ursi. Tonifying diuretics include dandelion, parsley, goldenrod, cleavers, cornsilk, nettles, and eucommia bark. Dandelion leaf is a better diuretic than dandelion root, because it is a better source of potassium, but both will aid urinary function. Parsley is also rich in potassium and is a gentle urinary stimulant, especially when eaten fresh.

Use stimulating diuretics for acute edema where the kidneys need a little boost. A *Diuretic Formula* where these herbs are the primary ingredients is better than using the remedies as singles. Use tonifying diuretics for long term use or with chronic kidney weakness. The *Chinese Water-Decreasing Formula* is a good tonifying diuretic blend.

## Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

Urine is often thought of as being unsanitary, but the truth is that urine is sterile, that is, free of bacteria. To get a bacterial infection, bacteria have to enter the urethra and travel upwards into the bladder. These are often bacteria from the colon like *E. coli*.



Because women have a much shorter urethra, they are five times more prone to UTIs than men. So, keeping this area clean, and wiping from front to back after using the rest room, can help prevent UTIs.

UTIs are typically treated with antibiotics. Unfortunately, frequent use of antibiotics disrupts the friendly bacteria in the colon, which can weaken the immune system and make one more prone to future UTIs. Yeast infections can also lead to UTIs, which antibiotics won't help.

### Herbs for Urinary Infections

There are herbs that you can take to help prevent UTIs. Research shows that cranberries can inhibit bacteria from adhering to urinary passages, which helps prevent bladder infections. So, if you're prone to frequent UTIs, consider drinking unsweetened cranberry juice daily or taking a *UTI Prevention Formula* containing cranberry daily for prevention.

For active UTIs, cranberry doesn't help much. Here, it's best to use herbs containing arbutin or berberine. Arbutin is a substance that is changed in the kidneys to form hydroquinone, a powerful urinary disinfectant. It is most effective when the urine is alkaline. Uva ursi and pipsissewa contain this compound.

Berberine containing herbs include goldenseal, Oregon grape, barberry, and coptis. You can also get berberine itself as a supplement. Berberine is an antibacterial agent, which is excreted via the kidneys, disinfecting the urinary passages.

These herbs are usually combined with diuretics like juniper and buchu to fight infections. Look for a *UTI Fighting Formula* that contains diuretics combined with infection-fighting herbs. Uva ursi works well as a tea. Drink about a half to one cup a day.

## Urinary Tract Inflammation

There are several inflammatory diseases that take place in the urinary system. Interstitial cystitis (or just cystitis) is inflammation of the bladder, a condition that can make the bladder irritable causing a frequent urge to urinate. Urethritis is inflammation of the urethra, the tube that drains the urine from the bladder. This can cause painful, burning, or scalding urination. The kidneys can also become inflamed, a serious condition called nephritis.



When inflammation is present in the urinary system, the urge to urinate frequently or pain while urinating causes many people to drink less water. This makes the problem worse as the body needs water to dilute the irritants causing the inflammation and/or flush out the infection. So, drink more, not less water, when dealing with urinary inflammation.

Three of the best remedies to ease the burning or scalding sensations are cornsilk, marshmallow and kava kava. Kava kava is especially helpful for painful urination as it is mildly analgesic. Cornsilk and marshmallow soothe the inflammation and burning. Stimulating diuretics like juniper and buchu are not good choices for urinary tract inflammation and should definitely be avoided in nephritis, but you can use some of the tonifying diuretics, like dandelion, goldenrod and cleavers with these soothing urinary remedies.

## Urgency and Incontinence

Incontinence occurs when the sphincter muscle at the bottom of the bladder is unable to retain urine. This can be caused by UTIs, constipation, or foods and substances that irritate the bladder such as spices, caffeine, alcohol, blood pressure medications, and muscle relaxants. It can also be related to a lack of tone in the sphincter muscle that controls urination.



Many people also have problems with the frequent urge to urinate, followed by scanty urination. This is often due to the fact that the person isn't drinking enough water. Their urine is too concentrated and irritates the bladder. It can also be the result of a UTI or cystitis.

Again, if you have these problems don't try to solve them by reducing water intake. Instead, drink the water you need and use herbal remedies to strengthen the sphincter muscle and ease irritation.

## Herbs for Urgency and Incontinence

If you're suffering from incontinence or excessive irritation, start by avoiding substances which irritate the bladder. To reduce the urge to urinate frequently stay well hydrated and use soothing diuretics like cornsilk, marshmallow, and pipsissewa. Pipsissewa is very helpful for UTIs, cystitis, and irritable bladder.

For incontinence, it can be helpful to tone the urinary sphincter muscle with a urinary astringent, such as uva ursi or horsetail. Both will work better when taken as a tea and sipped frequently throughout the day. You can also use a tincture or extract and take ten drops with water every 3-4 hours.

A helpful remedy for both problems is the *Chinese Water-Increasing Formula* which contains tonics for the kidneys and bladder like eucommia bark, Sichuan teasel root, and morinda root. This formula strengthens the entire urinary system.

## Kidney Stones

Kidney stones are typically formed from calcium oxalate and result from an over-concentration of minerals in the urine. People in primitive societies rarely develop kidney stones, so why should we?



Passing kidney stones can be excruciatingly painful, so it's better to prevent them than to treat them. Prevention starts with staying well hydrated and keeping the system alkaline by avoiding acid-forming beverages and foods, especially caffeinated and carbonated beverages. It also helps to avoid foods that significantly increase urinary oxalate including nuts (especially peanuts), chocolate, and tea. Magnesium and vitamin B6 are good supplements to take to prevent kidney stones.

If you get a kidney stone, you can help it to pass by taking lithotriptic herbs, such as hydrangea or gravel root. Lemon water also helps. Here's a good program. Mix the juice of four fresh lemons in a gallon of distilled water and drink this while fasting. Take four capsules of hydrangea every two to four hours. One capsule of kava kava can be taken with the hydrangea to relax urinary passages and ease pain. Marshmallow and/or cornsilk can be taken to soothe urinary membranes while the stone is passing.

## Nighttime Urination

Bed-wetting in children and the need to wake up frequently at night in adults are related conditions. Children wet the bed because they usually do not wake up to urinate at night, whereas adults, who have developed more sphincter muscle control will wake up with the urge to urinate. The problem of bed-wetting normally resolves itself as children get older, but for adults it often gets worse.

Some specific herbs that can help reduce the urge to urinate at night include astragalus, schizandra, licorice root, and asparagus root. These herbs help the body hold onto moisture.

**Continued on page 4**

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## Continued from page 3

It also helps to drink more water during the day and less water in the evening.

Nighttime urination and bed-wetting can both be a sign of excessive stress, blood sugar imbalances, and/or adrenal fatigue. If this is the case, A *Chinese Fire-Increasing Formula* (containing schizandra and biota) will often be helpful. It's also helpful to avoid sugary foods before bedtime in favor of a light protein snack. Giving children licorice root and magnesium may also help. Prostate problems can also cause men to have problems with both urgency and nighttime urination.

## Prostatitis and BPH

In males, the prostate sits just under the bladder, surrounding the urethra. Prostatitis is when the prostate becomes inflamed and swells, making urination difficult. The prostate can also enlarge due to over stimulation by estrogens, a condition known as benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH).

Nettle root, pygeum bark, and saw palmetto can all help reduce prostate swelling or help to shrink the prostate, thus aiding urine flow. Zinc and omega-3 essential fatty acids may also be helpful. Consider using a *Prostate Formula* containing these ingredients. For prostatitis, choose a formula that also contains diuretics and herbs that fight UTIs.

## Kidney Weakness

Understanding the indications for kidney weakness will help you recognize declining kidney function before the situation becomes dire. These include many of the aforementioned problems like incontinence, nighttime urination, and excessive urgency, but also include arthritis, osteoporosis, low back pain and weakness in the legs and knees.

Herbs that help strengthen the urinary system include goldenrod, nettle, parsley, morinda root, eucommia bark, and dandelion leaf. Nettle leaf helps the kidneys flush acid more

efficiently. Goldenrod improves kidney filtration. Eucommia and morinda root are tonics for the kidney qi used in TCM. Both are found in the *Chinese Water-Increasing Formula*, which is very helpful for strengthening the urinary and structural systems. It can be helpful for back pain, weak knees, osteoporosis, arthritis, and for helping to prevent kidney stones, frequent urination, excessive urgency, and urinary incontinence.



## Renal Failure

Progressive kidney failure may not produce any symptoms in the initial stages, but as the kidneys become progressively weaker, the body becomes increasingly acidic and rising levels of urea in the blood will harm the brain and heart. This can lead to congestive heart failure, arrhythmia, tachycardia, and fibrillation. As symptoms progress a person may be placed on dialysis and/or be scheduled for a kidney transplant.

Actual kidney failure is a serious condition that requires medical treatment. However, nettle seed and the *Chinese Water-Increasing Formula* may be helpful in addition to medical treatment. It also helps to consume a diet of mostly fresh fruits and vegetables, particularly celery, parsley, and other potassium-rich greens. Charcoal poultices over the kidneys and drawing baths to pull toxins out of the skin (which has been called the third kidney) may also be helpful.

## Additional Help and Information

For more information about solving urinary health problems contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

*Strategies for Health* by Steven Horne

*Modern Herbal Dispensatory* by Thomas Easley and Steven Horne

*You're Not Sick, You're Thirsty* Water for Health, for Healing, for Life by F. Batmanghelidj