

# Asymptomatic Bacteriuria

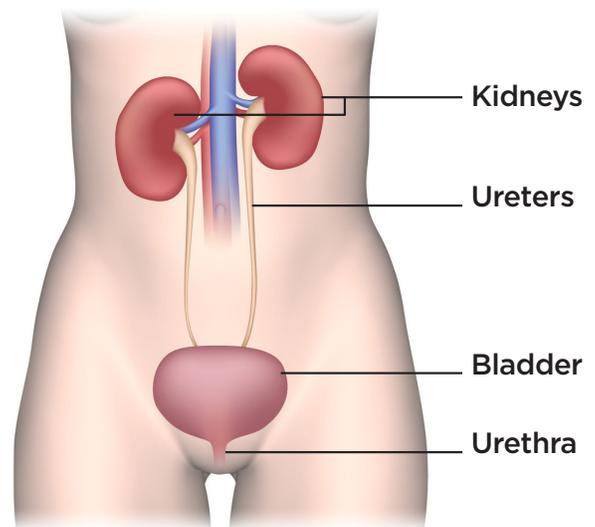
Voices for PFD



Asymptomatic Bacteriuria (ASB) means there are more bacteria than usual in the urine, but the person doesn't feel sick and has no signs of infection. ASB is most common in older women and in people who use a urinary catheter or have urinary leakage. Bacteria in the urine sample can happen either because some came from the vaginal area during collection, or because there are more bacteria in the urine itself. ASB usually goes away on its own and does not lead to problems. In most cases, it does not need to be treated.

## About ASB

Asymptomatic bacteriuria (ASB) refers to bacteria that live in and around the bladder of many healthy people without causing problems. A key sign of ASB is that you don't have any symptoms, and your urine test doesn't show signs of infection or inflammation in the bladder. Bacteria live in many places in the body such as on the skin, in the mouth, and in the bowel without causing harm. Similarly, bacteria can live in the bladder and vagina and not cause any symptoms or problems. As people get older, the chances of having bacteria in the urine without any symptoms go up. It's more common in women who have conditions like pelvic organ prolapse or urine leakage. In fact, more than 1 in 5 women who are older than 80 years may have ASB.



## LEARN THE TERMS

**Asymptomatic bacteriuria (ASB):** Bacteria that grow in the bladder of healthy people without symptoms, do not need to be treated except in rare circumstances.

**Catheter:** A tube temporarily placed to drain urine from your bladder.

**Urinary tract infections (UTIs):** An abnormal growth of bacteria in the urinary tract that causes symptoms such as burning when you pee, needing to go often or very suddenly, blood in your urine, pain in your lower belly and/or side, or a fever.

**Pyelonephritis:** Inflammation of the kidney due to a bacterial infection.

**Bacteremia and sepsis:** The spread of bacteria into the bloodstream and inflammation of the body that can happen from the bacteria.

## The Urinary System

The role of the urinary system is to remove waste from your body. It is made up of the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra:

- The kidneys filter waste from your blood and make urine.
- The ureters are long, thin tubes that carry the urine from the kidneys to the bladder.
- The bladder is a muscular pouch that expands to store the urine.
- The urethra is the tube that carries the urine from the bladder to the outside of the body.

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## Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

Urinary tract infections (UTIs) occur when bacteria in the urine cause symptoms which need treatment. Symptoms may include burning when you pee, needing to go often or very suddenly, blood in your urine, pain in your lower belly and/or side, or a fever. While ASB and UTIs both involve bacteria in the urine, the difference is that people with ASB do not have symptoms due to infection. Those with ASB may have symptoms due to other conditions like overactive bladder or bladder pain syndrome. People with UTI symptoms may need treatment with antibiotics, but most people with ASB do not.

## Treatment

There's usually no need to regularly check for or treat ASB, except in rare cases. ASB, even when present for a long time, has not been shown to lead to dangerous conditions like kidney infections (pyelonephritis) or blood infections (bacteremia or sepsis). If you don't have any symptoms, antibiotics will not change your overall health or make you feel better. Treating ASB when you don't have symptoms can be harmful. It can make the bacteria stronger and harder to treat if you get an infection in the future.

In the past, symptoms like falls or confusion in older adults were often blamed on ASBs. However, we now recommend not using antibiotics in these cases unless there are clear signs of infection, for the following reasons:

1. The bacteria usually go away without antibiotics.
2. There is a chance of killing "good bacteria" and developing significant diarrhea and yeast infections.

3. Unnecessary antibiotics can lead to bacteria being more difficult to treat if you have an infection in the future.
4. It can cause side effects like rash or upset stomach.

In some cases, women with ASB may still need treatment. Two important reasons are:

- During pregnancy
- Before certain types of surgery that involve the urinary tract

In these situations, treating ASB can help prevent complications.

## When to Call Your Physician

Call your doctor if you have symptoms of UTI, such as burning when you pee, needing to go often or very suddenly, blood in your urine, pain in your lower belly and/or side, or a fever. Your physician may want to test your urine and/or treat you with antibiotics.

## What to Do if You're Diagnosed with ASB

If you're told you have ASB, your clinician may not treat it. This is because in many women (between 10% and 60%), the bacteria may go away on its own. Instead, your health care professional might suggest staying well hydrated and watching for any signs of a UTI. Signs of UTI can include burning when you pee, needing to pee more often, lower belly pain, blood in the urine or fevers.

## Three Takeaways

1. **Healthy women who are not pregnant — whether before or after menopause — do not need to be tested or treated for ASB.**
2. **ASB, even when lasting, does not appear to cause major problems.**
3. **Unnecessary antibiotics can have side effects and lead to bacteria that are difficult to treat in the future.**