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PROFESSOR JOHN MURTAGH

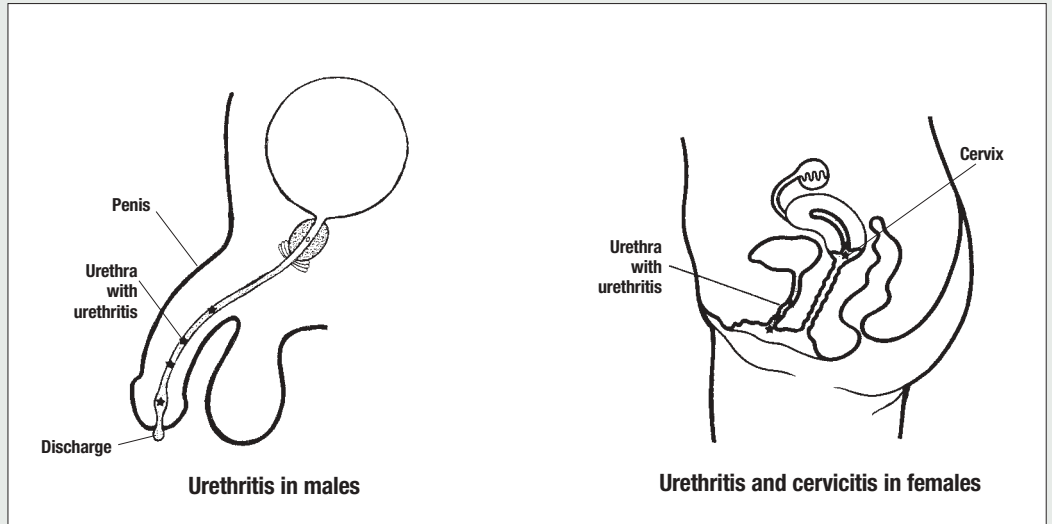
THIS monthly series of patient handouts covers common conditions seen in general practice. GPs can cut out and keep the handouts to photocopy for their patients or access the leaflets on *Australian Doctor's* web site at [www.australiandoctor.com.au](http://www.australiandoctor.com.au) under Patient Education.

The handouts will be posted on the web site after publication, gradually building up to an extensive library of patient resources.

Professor Murtagh is adjunct professor in the department of general practice at Monash University, and professorial fellow in general practice at the University of Melbourne.

# Patient Handouts

## Chlamydia infection



### What is chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a bacteria and one of its types, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, is the most common sexually transmissible bacterial infection in Australia.

It mainly infects the urethra in both sexes and the cervix in women. It is three times as common as gonorrhoea.

### What are the symptoms?

The symptoms appear about two weeks after intercourse, although the incubation period can be as long as 12 weeks and as short as 5-10 days.

### In men

Most often the symptoms are trivial. About 40% of men with chlamydia may have no symptoms.

If present, the main symptoms are:

- A burning sensation when passing urine.
- A discharge (clear, white or yellow) from the penis.

Sometimes there is no discharge, just pain.

The first noticeable symptom is a slight tingling or burning at the tip of the penis, usually first seen in the morning. The pain sometimes becomes quite severe.

The discharge soon follows.

It is usually clear at first, but if untreated, can become heavier and yellowish. The infection can spread to the prostate gland and testicles.

In some, the only symptoms are spots on the underpants or dampness under the foreskin.

### In women

Chlamydia usually causes no symptoms in women (up to 70%). It may cause vaginal discharge and some women may notice burning on urination.

If untreated, as is often the case, it can infect the fallopian tubes. This is the most common form of pelvic inflammatory disease, which can result in infertility.

### How is it diagnosed?

There are two main methods used for diagnosis and the choice depends on the method available in the clinic and the patient's preference.

A swab taken from the urethra of the penis in males and the cervix and urethra in females for culture is a reliable method.

A more acceptable method, because it is less embarrassing and more comfortable, is to perform special tests on the first voided specimen of urine.

### How is chlamydia caught and spread?

It is transmitted from one person to another during sexual intercourse. Men can pick it up through vaginal sex (often the woman carries the infection without knowing) or, less commonly, through anal or oral sex with either sex.

### Who is at risk?

The risk factors can vary from one community to another, but the following risk factors have been identified:

- Aged under 25.
- Recent change of sexual partner.
- Lack of barrier contraception (eg, condoms).
- Use of the oral contraceptive pill.

It is important to know that other sexually transmitted infections may also be present.

### How is chlamydia treated?

It is treated with a course of antibiotics, usually azithromycin as a single dose, or tetracycline or doxycycline for 10 days. It usually responds well to treatment, but can be slow to respond in some people and may recur in others. About one in five patients will need more than one course of antibiotics.

It is the male who usually notices symptoms and comes for treatment. However, it is important that the sexual partner(s) are tested even if they have no symptoms. Sexual intercourse should be avoided until the infection has cleared up in both partners.

### How is chlamydia prevented?

Using condoms for vaginal or anal sex provides some, but not complete, protection.

### Important points

- Chlamydia is a common sexually transmitted infection.
- It sometimes causes symptoms in men.
- There may be no symptoms in women.
- It is a serious public health issue.
- People may unknowingly spread chlamydia.
- It can cause infertility in women (and less commonly in men).
- It is readily treated by antibiotics. Treatment may be a single dose only, but repeat courses may be needed.
- All sexual partners need to be treated.
- Do not have sex until the infection has cleared in both partners.
- Condoms provide some protection.

AUTHOR: PROFESSOR JOHN MURTAGH

Australian Doctor.

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Patient Information – Cut Out And Keep Section