

UTI in Older Adults

Quick-reference for community pharmacists · NHS Pharmacy First · Based on NICE CKS guidance

■ CALL 999 / IMMEDIATE A&E:: Signs of Urosepsis

- Fast breathing (22 breaths/min or more)
- Mottled, cyanotic, or pale skin with low BP (below 90 mmHg systolic)
- Rigors: uncontrolled shaking or chills
- New confusion with any systemic feature in an older adult

Do not wait to see if symptoms settle. Stay with the patient until the ambulance arrives.

■ SAME-DAY GP / 111: Urgent Assessment Needed

- Fever (38°C or higher) without systemic collapse
- Loin or flank pain: possible pyelonephritis, requires prompt assessment
- Sudden-onset confusion with a likely UTI but no sepsis features
- Catheterised patient with any systemic upset
- Men, under-16s, over-64s, or patients outside Pharmacy First criteria

Loin pain always requires same-day medical review. Do not manage upper tract infection with self-care.

✓ NHS PHARMACY FIRST / SELF-CARE: Uncomplicated Lower UTI

- Women aged 16 to 64 only
- Dysuria with at least one of: frequency, urgency, or haematuria
- No fever, loin pain, systemic features, pregnancy, catheter, or recent antibiotics
- **First-line:** nitrofurantoin 100 mg modified-release twice daily for 3 days
- If nitrofurantoin unsuitable: trimethoprim 200 mg twice daily for 7 days

Safety-net all patients: seek urgent review if symptoms worsen, fever or loin pain develops, or no improvement within 48 hours.

Feature	More likely benign	Red flag ■
Onset	Gradual, with classic dysuria and urinary frequency	Sudden or rapidly worsening, especially without classic urinary symptoms
Temperature	Apyrexial	Fever 38°C or higher, or rigors (uncontrolled shaking)
Pain location	Suprapubic discomfort only	Loin or flank pain: suggests upper tract infection (pyelonephritis)
Mental state	Alert and orientated	Acute confusion, agitation, or sudden change in behaviour
Systemic signs	None	Fast breathing, mottled or cyanotic skin, low BP: signs of sepsis
Patient group	Healthy adult under 65, no comorbidities	Over 65, catheterised, immunocompromised, or pregnant
Urine	Cloudy or offensive odour alone (not diagnostic in isolation)	Haematuria with systemic upset

Key reminders: In older adults, acute confusion or a sudden change in behaviour may be the only sign of a UTI. Do not wait for classic urinary symptoms before escalating. Loin or flank pain indicates upper urinary tract infection; always refer same-day. Women aged 16 to 64 with uncomplicated lower UTI can be treated under NHS Pharmacy First without a GP referral.