

Talking With Residents and Family Members About Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

My father is not himself today. His urine is dark and smells bad. Does he have a urinary tract infection?

- The most common symptoms of urinary tract infections (UTIs) are a burning feeling when urinating and a strong urge to urinate often.
- Dark, foul-smelling, and cloudy urine are not enough to decide if someone has a UTI.
- Confusion or disorientation without vital sign changes suggesting infection or urinary symptoms are rarely, if ever, symptoms of a UTI.
- Your father may be a little dehydrated. You can help with that by encouraging him to drink juice or water.

Last time this happened, the doctor prescribed an antibiotic and he felt better.

- Many older people get an antibiotic for UTI treatment even though they do not have symptoms of a UTI.
- Sometimes feeling better after an antibiotic is not due to the antibiotic, but instead due to improved hydration.
- Antibiotics do not help when there are no UTI symptoms, and we have newer data indicating that taking antibiotics when there is not an infection can be harmful.

Would you just check his urine... just to be sure?

- Sometimes people, including health care practitioners, think that a positive urine test means there is an infection, but we have newer data indicating that a positive urine test does not mean that there is an infection.
- Also, nearly half of nursing home residents have bacteria colonizing their bladder. This is called asymptomatic bacteriuria. It does not cause people to get sick.

I'm still worried about my father. What can we do for him?

- Thank you for telling me about your concerns. What else are you noticing?
- We will check his vital signs every 6 hours and monitor him closely. You can call us back tomorrow afternoon for an update.
- We will review his medications and try to get him to eat and drink more.
- If something changes, and he gets a fever or shows other signs or symptoms of an infection, an antibiotic can still be given.