

When is a urology problem urgent? Emergency warning signs

Most urologic symptoms are not emergencies, but a small number punish delay because blood flow, drainage, tissue, kidney function or nerve function is at risk. The right question is not how bad a symptom feels but what could be lost if you wait.

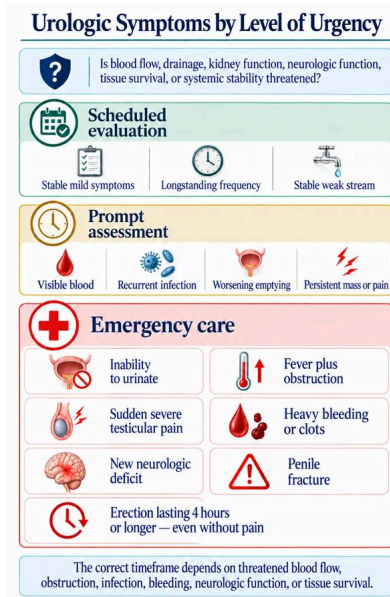


Figure 2.1. Urologic Symptoms by Level of Urgency. An erection lasting four hours or longer needs emergency assessment even without pain; pain is not a prerequisite for the emergency pathway shown here.

Key points

- Fear and urgency are not the same: severe pain can be stable, and a mild symptom can be dangerous.
- Sudden testicular pain must be treated as possible torsion until proven otherwise.
- Fever with a blocked kidney can become life-threatening and may need drainage, not just antibiotics.
- Sudden inability to urinate and an erection lasting four hours or longer need emergency care, even without pain.
- Visible blood that stops on its own still needs evaluation.
- "Not an emergency" does not mean "not important."

Get prompt care if you notice

- Sudden severe testicular pain
- An erection lasting four hours or longer, even without pain
- Sudden complete inability to urinate, with or without bladder pain
- Fever or chills with flank pain or suspected obstruction
- Rapidly progressive genital pain, swelling, skin changes or feeling very ill
- Heavy urinary bleeding with clots and inability to urinate
- Urinary symptoms with confusion, fainting, severe weakness, leg weakness, saddle numbness or loss of bowel control

Questions to ask your urologist

- What is the immediate threat, and is blood flow, drainage, kidney function or tissue at risk?
- Does treatment need to begin now, or is close follow-up safe?
- What will this test answer, and could an infection be trapped behind a blockage?
- Which symptoms should bring me back immediately?
- When and how will the underlying cause be evaluated once the emergency is controlled?

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