

Urinary reflux

Urinary reflux is a condition that is usually diagnosed in childhood. It means urine is flowing back from your bladder into your kidneys.

The main job of kidneys is to filter your blood and remove waste and unwanted water. The waste and unwanted water becomes urine, which travels through tubes called ureters to your bladder. It stays in your bladder, before it is passed out of your body through a tube called your urethra.

There are valves in the ureters that stop the urine going back into the child's kidneys. There are two reasons urinary reflux can happen:

- there's a defect in the valves in the child's ureters, the tubes between their kidneys and bladder
- there's a blockage in their urinary system.

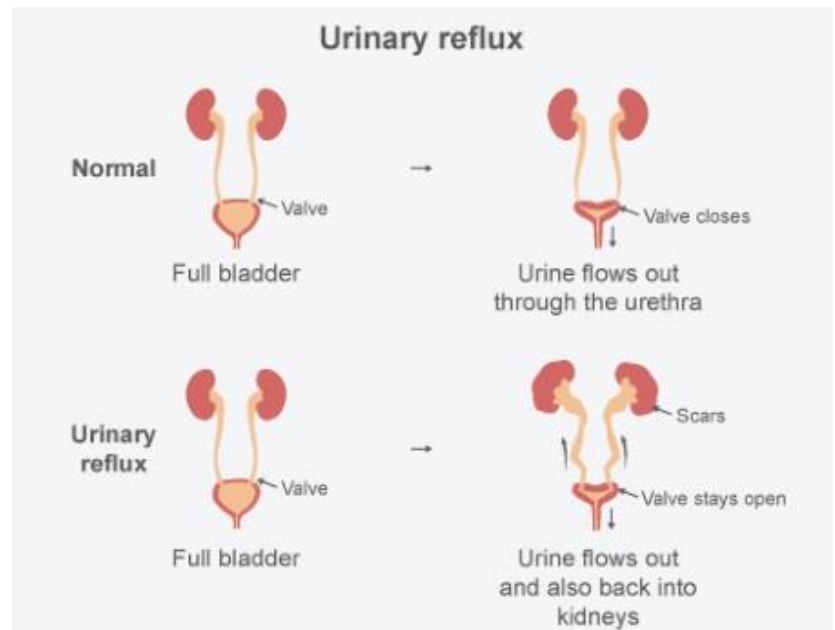
A child with urinary reflux is more likely to get urinary tract infections (UTIs), and these can cause kidney damage if they're not treated. This is called reflux nephropathy (nef-roh-path-y), and as a result their kidneys can't work as well as they should.

What are the symptoms of urinary reflux?

Most symptoms of urinary reflux are the result of getting an infection. They can include:

- pain in the child's tummy
- a burning feeling when they pass urine (pee or wee)
- a high temperature (fever)
- a need to pass urine (pee) more often
- urine that smells bad
- frothing urine.

Urinary reflux is usually diagnosed with an ultrasound scan, which looks at the size of the child's kidneys to see if there is any swelling. Sometimes it shows up before birth, on a routine pregnancy ultrasound.





How is urinary reflux treated?

Children with urinary reflux usually take antibiotics to clear any urinary infection. Very occasionally they may have an operation to mend their ureter valves, and stop urine from flowing back into their kidneys.

Usually, reflux gets better with age and there are no long-term complications. If there is scarring, it is usually minor, and doesn't cause any long-term problems.

However, sometimes it can cause long-term damage to a child's kidneys. If a child has had urinary reflux, they should regularly have their blood pressure checked, to make sure there are no long-term problems. (Kidney damage can cause high blood pressure.)

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Endorsed by clinical director, Nephrology Department, Canterbury DHB. August 2016.