

Your
Journal

Interstitial Cystitis

The TV Series

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UNDERSTANDING INTERSTITIAL CYSTITIS

Interstitial cystitis (IC) is a chronic bladder condition with symptoms ranging from frequent urination to pelvic pain. It is estimated that 800,000 to several million Americans suffer from IC, but many wait years for a correct diagnosis.

IC can have a dramatic impact on everyday life, particularly if it is untreated. The need to urinate frequently can make it impossible to sit through a business meeting or movie, and chronic pain may cause the patient to become withdrawn or depressed.

Fortunately, recent breakthroughs are giving doctors a better understanding of this difficult disease. There are now a wide range of treatment options that allow many patients to keep IC from interfering with the activities they enjoy.

More than an Overactive Bladder

IC is often confused with Overactive Bladder Syndrome, because both conditions cause sudden, frequent urges to urinate. However, IC tends to be more troubling because it also causes pain.

In people with IC, the wall of the bladder is usually swollen and sore. Doctors aren't sure what causes this, but one theory is that the protective lining of the bladder breaks down, allowing toxins in the urine to irritate the bladder wall. This can lead to chronic pain and an urge to urinate even when there's only a small amount of urine in the bladder.

Risk Factors

Gender – IC is far more common in women, but sometimes occurs in men.

Age – IC is typically diagnosed in middle age, but doctors have identified patients in their 20's.

Signs & Symptoms

The symptoms of IC vary widely from person to person and even from day to day in the same person. They may come on suddenly or develop slowly over a period of years. Some of the most common symptoms include:

Frequent urination – Urinating more than eight to ten times a day could be a sign that something is wrong, depending on how much fluid you take in and how active you are. People with IC often feel the need to urinate several times an hour, even at night.

Sense of urgency – In addition to urinating frequently, people with IC often experience an overwhelming urge to urinate that may come on with little or no warning.

Painful urination – Some patients experience pain or discomfort during urination.

Painful intercourse – Many women with IC experience pain in the pelvic region during or shortly after sexual intercourse. Some may also notice an unusual cramping pain one week before menses.

Chronic pain – Patients with IC often have chronic pain in the pelvic region that may range from mild to severe. The precise location of the pain can vary and may spread to the back or legs in some people.

These symptoms could signal many conditions other than IC, so it's important to discuss them carefully with your health care provider.

TREATMENTS and OPTIONS

Primary care physicians are taking on a greater role in diagnosing IC, as doctors learn more about the disease. Your general practitioner may begin by asking a series of specific questions about bladder pain, frequency and urgency. The next step is to rule out other causes of pelvic pain and urinary problems, such as bladder or urinary tract infections. If your urine shows no sign of a bacterial infection and IC is suspected, your doctor may refer you to a specialist.

There are no specific tests to confirm whether a patient has IC. Doctors usually make a diagnosis based on symptoms and a visual exam of the bladder, which tends to be inflamed in people with IC. Because IC can be tricky to diagnose, some patients suffer for years and visit multiple doctors before they get a correct diagnosis.

There is no standard treatment for IC, but there are a wide range of therapies that may reduce inflammation and pain, as well as urinary problems. While there is no cure, some treatments can help restore the lining of the bladder. This can prevent toxins in the urine from continuing to irritate the bladder wall, giving it a chance to heal. Treatment options include:

Oral medications – Your doctor may prescribe pain relievers, as well as medication to coat the lining of the bladder.

Intravesical therapy – A combination of a pain-relieving anesthetic and other medications may be periodically injected directly into the bladder through a thin catheter.

Surgery – In severe cases, a surgeon may burn damaged areas of the bladder wall with a laser to prevent the nerves from sending pain signals.

Diet – Some health care providers recommend people with IC watch what they eat, because the bladder can be highly sensitive to a variety of irritants found in common foods, including:

- Citrus foods
- Tomatoes
- Caffeinated products
- Alcohol
- Cranberry juice

Many patients are surprised to see cranberry juice on this list, because it is often associated with urinary health. While cranberry juice may be helpful for people with a bladder infection, it has the opposite effect in people with IC. Cranberry juice is very acidic and can damage an already irritated bladder.

Once you have eliminated these foods from your diet, you may want to add them back in one at a time to find out which ones truly aggravate your symptoms. That way you won't give up foods you enjoy unnecessarily.

The results of these therapies vary from individual to individual, and it may take trial and error to find a strategy that works for you. It may also be necessary to continue treatment indefinitely in order to maintain the benefits.

When untreated, IC can make it difficult to live your life the way you want. You may find yourself giving up favorite activities like playing sports or going to the theater. Depression is a common problem in people with any type of chronic pain. If you have symptoms of IC and you are not getting satisfactory relief, seek out other opinions. Look for doctors who specialize in IC and contact organizations or support groups who can suggest coping strategies.

While finding the right treatment may take persistence, the results are well worth the effort. Many people with IC are able to calm their bladders and reclaim their lives.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q What is Interstitial Cystitis (IC)?

A IC is a chronic inflammation of the bladder that may cause urinary problems and pelvic pain.

Q Who gets IC?

A IC occurs in both men and women, but is far more common in women. Most people are diagnosed in their 30's and 40's.

Q What causes IC?

A Doctors aren't sure what causes IC, but one theory is that the protective lining of the bladder breaks down, allowing toxins in the urine to irritate the bladder wall.

Q How is frequent urination defined?

A Emptying the bladder more than eight to 10 times a day could be a sign that something is wrong. The bladder's job is to store urine until it is full, so there may be a problem if you feel the need to urinate small amounts at short intervals.

Q What should you do if you think you have IC?

A Discuss your symptoms with your health care provider and get a second opinion if you feel your concerns aren't taken seriously.

Q How does IC impact everyday life?

A The combination of chronic pain and an overactive bladder can have a dramatic impact on daily activities. People with IC may have to urinate several times during a movie, sporting event or concert, making them more likely to stay home.

Q How does IC impact emotional health?

A Changing your lifestyle to accommodate a fussy bladder can be frustrating, and fighting pain on a daily basis can leave you with little energy for the things you enjoy. Consider joining a support group to learn coping strategies and consult a mental health professional if you have signs of depression.

Q Does diet play a role in IC?

A In people with IC, the bladder may be sensitive to highly acidic foods, such as citrus fruits and tomatoes. Some patients report that avoiding these foods improves their symptoms.

Q What are the symptoms of IC?

A Symptoms vary from patient to patient, but may include sudden, compelling urges to urinate, a frequent need to urinate, pain during intercourse or chronic pelvic pain.

DATA, RESOURCES, HOTLINES, PUBLICATIONS and MEDIA CONTACTS

Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA)

110 North Washington Street, Suite 340
Rockville, MD 20850
800-HELP-ICA (435-7422)
www.ichelp.org

Interstitial Cystitis Network (ICN)

4983 Sonoma Highway, Suite L
Santa Rosa, CA 95409
707-538-9442
www.ic-network.com

National Association for Continence

P.O. Box 1019
Charleston, SC 29402-1019
800-BLADDER
www.nafc.org

American Foundation for Urologic Disease

1000 Corporate Boulevard, Suite 410
Linthicum, MD 21090
800-828-7866 or 410-689-3990
www.afud.org

American Academy of Pain Management

13947 Mono Way #A
Sonoma, CA 95370
209-533-9744
www.aapainmanage.org

American Chronic Pain Association

P.O. Box 850
Rocklin, CA 95677-0850
916-632-0922
www.theacpa.org

American Pain Foundation

201 N. Charles Street, Suite 710
Baltimore, MD 21201-4111
888-615-PAIN (7246)
www.painfoundation.org

American Pain Society

4700 West Lake Avenue
Glenview, IL 60025
847-375-4715
www.ampainsoc.org

For a DVD copy of a 30 minute documentary style program on "IC" call 1-888-380-6500 or visit.

www.healthybodyhealthymind.com

To watch on television, consult your local public television station for air-times in your area.

