

Interstitial Cystitis

Painful Bladder Syndrome, Bladder Pain Syndrome, Hypersensitive Bladder Syndrome

Interstitial cystitis (IC), also known as painful bladder syndrome, bladder pain syndrome and hypersensitive bladder syndrome in different parts of the world, is a debilitating, chronic bladder disorder of unknown cause, with symptoms of pain, pressure or discomfort related to the bladder and usually associated with a frequent and urgent need to urinate day and night. While the symptoms may resemble bacterial cystitis, there is no infection to be seen in the urine and no other identifiable disorder that could account for the symptoms. The characteristic symptoms are:

pain, urgency and frequency.

- Pain, pressure or discomfort that may increase as the bladder fills; urinating usually alleviates the pain and gives a temporary sense of relief;
- Suprapubic pain, lower abdominal (pelvic) pain, sometimes extending to the lower part of the back; pain may also be felt in the groin and thighs;
- In women there may be pain in the vagina;
- In men, pain in the penis, testicles, scrotum and perineum;
- Both sexes may have pain in the urethra;
- Pain with sexual intercourse (both men and women);
- A frequent need to urinate, including at night;
- An often urgent need to urinate.

The pain may be experienced as a burning sensation in the bladder, in the form of spasms in or around the bladder, or stabbing vaginal pain, or a feeling of pressure on the bladder. It may be constant or intermittent. Pain may also spread throughout the pelvic floor and into the lower back.

The symptoms may begin spontaneously for no apparent reason at all, sometimes following an operation, particularly - in the case of women - after a hysterectomy or other gynaecological surgery, after childbirth or following a severe bacterial infection of the bladder.

It is a bladder condition that is mainly found in women (80-90%). Approximately 10-20% of IC patients are men who may in the past have been incorrectly diagnosed as having non-bacterial prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate gland) or prostatodynia (pain in the prostate gland).

Spontaneous flares and remission of symptoms are a characteristic feature of interstitial cystitis. Many women find that their symptoms are exacerbated just before menstruation and during the menopause.

Sexual intercourse may be painful for both male and female patients and for some even impossible.

Many patients experience exacerbation of their IC symptoms due to stress of either an emotional or physical nature. But it is important to emphasize that there is no evidence that stress is a cause of IC.

The constant need to urinate can form a major obstacle to work, travel, visiting friends, or

simply going shopping. When outside the confines of the home, the IC patient's life is dominated by the question 'where am I going to find the next toilet?'

Despite considerable research into many different aspects of IC, the cause is still unknown. It is gradually becoming accepted that IC may not have one single cause, but may in fact be a multi-factorial syndrome characterized by an inflammatory response of the bladder wall that could be based on a number of different factors such as allergic, immunological, neuro-vascular, bacterial or viral infection and even environmental factors. There are many different theories, but no answers have as yet been found.

No possibility has as yet been found of curing this disease, merely of alleviating the symptoms. Treatment is highly individual and no medication exists that is equally effective in all IC patients.

Treatment may consist of oral drugs, bladder instillations or injections, bladder distension, neuro/electro-stimulation, laser therapy or various forms of surgery.

In some patients, IC may be accompanied by pain in joints and muscles, chronic fatigue, gastrointestinal disorders, fibromyalgia, vulvodinia, allergies and medicine intolerance. IC occurs more frequently than normal in association with rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), Sjögren's syndrome, and thyroid disorders.

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