

Do I have Interstitial Cystitis?

What is it?

Interstitial Cystitis (IC) is a painful bladder syndrome of unknown etiology that can range from mild, irritative urinary symptoms to a debilitating disease. The most common symptoms are frequent urination, often with a sensation of urgency, and constant bladder or pelvic pain which may be temporarily relieved with voiding. These symptoms can be exacerbated by stress, intercourse, eating certain foods or excessive exercise. It is believed that IC is due to an immune problem which can affect multiple areas of the body. Concurrent medical problems such as migraine headaches, Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), endometriosis and fibromyalgia - which consists of joint tenderness with multiple painful areas on the body, are often reported. Through increased patient and physician awareness, more patients are being accurately diagnosed with IC. Prior to this information, the average time between the onset of symptoms and the actual diagnosis of IC was 5 years!

Who gets it?

Women are ten times more likely to have IC than men. It occurs predominately over the age of 40, but it can occur at any age.

How do I find out if I have IC?

A thorough history and physical examination, as well as specific diagnostic studies by your physician, are required to accurately make this diagnosis. In addition, other studies may include:

Voiding diary - a self completed log to review the amount of fluid you drink as well as the amount and number of times you urinate throughout the day and night. Oftentimes, this diary can be used to identify specific food or liquid triggers that exacerbate your bladder symptoms as well.

Cystoscopy - a specialized camera is placed into your bladder to look for specific bladder wall changes that are consistent with this disease. This examination is done in a surgery center under anesthesia to obtain the most information.

Treatments:

Behavioral modification - by discussing possible food triggers or specific activities, changes can be made in your daily activity that may dramatically improve you symptoms.

Oral medications have shown significant promise for the treatment of IC, but they may require an extended period of time to become effective. As a result, multiple medications are often used to obtain a more rapid response.

Bladder instillations - a combination of medications are placed into the bladder for direct treatment during flare ups, as well as a maintenance therapy.

Physical therapy techniques which utilize specific trigger points within the vaginal or near the bladder can be stimulated to decrease the nerve stimulus to the bladder and give you relief.