

## Facts about Interstitial Cystitis

Interstitial cystitis (IC) is a chronic painful condition of the bladder. Also known as painful bladder syndrome (PBS), IC symptoms are similar to a bladder infection, but IC is unresponsive to antibiotics. More than one million Americans—of all ages, genders, races, and ethnicities—suffer from IC. For every one person with Parkinson's disease, two people suffer from IC.

IC can be a debilitating condition that negatively impacts nearly every aspect of a person's life. Because of the complexity of the disease and lack of information for healthcare professionals, it may take up to five years to obtain a diagnosis of IC, which is based on:

- Pain and/or pressure in the bladder or pelvic region
- Unexplained urinary urgency and frequency, as often as every ten minutes
- Absence of infection and negative urine cultures
- Ruling out other diseases that can cause similar symptoms

In severe cases, IC patients suffer from unrelenting pain in the pelvic region that necessitates trips to the bathroom as often as every 10 to 15 minutes—both during the day and at night—for relief. Some people with IC have symptoms so severe that they prevent them from leaving their homes or even riding in a car—greatly limiting or preventing their ability to work full time (if at all), travel, or participate in leisure activities. In addition, some people with IC are unable to share sexual intimacy with their partners because sex can exacerbate the condition.

Many different treatments are available to relieve IC symptoms. However, because symptoms can vary from person to person, treatments also vary from individual to individual. It sometimes takes a period of "trial and error" before the most effective treatment or combination of treatments results in improvement.

- **Self-help therapies:** Healthcare providers consider self-help treatments the first step in relieving symptoms. For example, modifying diet (avoiding acidic, spicy, and other potentially problematic foods, as well as limiting caffeine, carbonated drinks, and alcohol), reducing stress through relaxation exercises and biofeedback, and trying bladder retraining programs.
- **Oral medications** to treat IC symptoms include Elmiron (pentosan polysulfate sodium, the only oral medication approved for specific use in IC), antihistamines, muscle relaxants, and tricyclic antidepressants to alleviate pain, as well as other pain medications.
- **Bladder instillations** may be added to the IC treatment protocol and include DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide), heparin, Marcaine and combinations of medicines called “bladder cocktails.”

More research is needed to understand all aspects of IC, including variations in treatment response. There are a number of promising clinical trials testing potential new IC treatments underway.

*The Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA) is the authoritative source of IC information in the United States. For more information about IC and the ICA, please visit [www.ichelp.org](http://www.ichelp.org).*

*Putting the pieces together*

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