

Managing Your Health

How to Find the Right Doctor

Managing a chronic illness like interstitial cystitis (IC) depends, in part, on your choice of doctor. Your primary care physician (PCP) may refer you to a specialist. A urologist is a doctor specializing in bladder diseases. Some gynecologists and urogynecologists (women's health doctors) also treat people with IC.

Look for a doctor who has experience taking care of people with IC. When you meet the doctor, decide whether you would be comfortable discussing personal issues such as sexual relations and urination problems.

Your doctor will work with you to decide on a treatment plan. To help you make informed decisions, pick a doctor who will discuss a range of treatment options with you. You may wish to talk with your doctor about including psychological support, pain management, physical therapy, and stress management in your IC treatment plan.

It's your right to change doctors, consult other physicians, or seek second opinions. Ask each doctor for copies of test results and other documents. Keep copies of all of the paperwork provided by your insurance company—for both care provided and care denied. Create a complete copy of your medical record. If you change doctors, give your new doctor a copy of your medical record.

To help manage your IC, join the Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA) to learn about the latest treatment options. Contact the ICA by phone or email with your questions and go to www.ichelp.org for support group information.

Take Steps to Find the Right Doctor for You

1. Email ICAMail@ichelp.org or call 800-435-7422 and ask about the Healthcare Provider Registry. This is a national list of doctors, nurse practitioners, physical therapists, and other healthcare providers who treat people with IC.
2. Visit www.ama-assn.org and check the licensure status of possible doctors. Click on the button called "Doctor Finder" and search for a doctor in your area.
3. Check out www.docboard.org to confirm the doctor's state licensing.
4. Make an appointment to meet with the doctor. You don't have to agree to an exam or medical tests during this first visit. You may want to interview another healthcare provider and compare findings.
 - During this appointment, ask some of the questions listed on the back of this page.
 - Learn about their experience treating IC patients and usual treatment approaches.
 - Ask yourself how you feel about this initial meeting and trust your feelings.

Putting the pieces together

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Website: www.ichelp.org • Toll-Free: 1-800-HELP-ICA

Ask About IC

- What is interstitial cystitis?
- What are the symptoms of IC?
- What tests are used to diagnose IC?
- Why are these tests required?
- What are the risks, discomforts, and costs of these tests?
- When will the test results be available?
- Will you give me with a written copy of the results?
- Will you review the results with me?

Talk About Treatment Options

- What are the treatments for IC?
- What are the benefits, possible side effects, and risks of each treatment?
- How will you decide which treatment is best for me?
- If one treatment does not work, are there other options available to me?
- How long do I need to follow this treatment before I might expect to see some improvement?
- Are there lifestyle changes that can help me manage the symptoms of IC?

Find Out About Patient Care

- Do you have a set time for returning telephone calls from patients?
- How quickly do you usually respond to patient calls?
- Do you use email to communicate with patients?
- How quickly do you responds to emails?
- Is a doctor responsible for all follow up care or will I see a nurse, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant?
- Does your practice include a dietitian for nutrition counseling?
- Do you work with physical therapists?

The Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA, www.ichelp.org) is committed to finding more effective treatments and a cure for interstitial cystitis (IC), a painful, chronic bladder condition. The ICA promotes and funds research; educates the medical community and public; advocates for IC patients, healthcare providers, and researchers; and offers support for IC patients and their families.

For more information, visit www.ichelp.org or call 800-HELP-ICA (800-435-7422).

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