



Interstitial Cystitis (IC) & Diet

There's lots of information on the web promoting a special diet for interstitial cystitis (IC). And, both the American Urological Association (AUA) IC clinical guidelines and the American College of Obstetrical Gynecology (ACOG) chronic pelvic pain practice bulletin recommend dietary modification as an approach for helping to manage the IC.

However, research about the link between IC and food is limited. Currently, there is no set "IC Diet."

What research there is has found that there is a lot of variability among IC patients. Some people with IC report that certain foods appear to irritate their bladder and cause their IC to flare. And, they find that making a few strategic changes to what they eat and drink can help control IC symptoms and flare-ups. Other IC patients find that diet does not help to control IC symptoms.

The Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA) recommends eating a healthy, balanced diet. Also, find out if your health insurance covers the cost of nutrition counseling. Ask to meet with a registered dietitian (RD) to learn about how to identify foods and beverages that might bother your IC.

Clinical Guidelines

The *AUA Clinical Guidelines: Interstitial Cystitis/Bladder Pain Syndrome*, based on a review of the medical literature (1983 to late in 2009) and expert opinion, include dietary changes as a first line treatment:

- Avoid certain foods known to be common bladder irritants for IC such as coffee or citrus products.
- Use an elimination diet to determine which foods or beverages may contribute to symptoms.
- Over-the-counter nutrition supplements such as nutraceuticals and calcium glycerophosphates may also be helpful.

In 2004, ACOG issued a practice bulletin on chronic pelvic pain in women which included IC. The bulletin suggests healthcare providers consider nutritional interventions such as dietary modifications and herbal and nutritional therapy.

What We Know

The first research sorting out the link between diet and IC stems from self-report surveys conducted by patient groups. In 2003-2004, about 560 patients responded to an ICA mail-based, self-report survey, which offers some of the first patient insights about the relationship between food and IC symptoms. Findings highlight the helpfulness of diet modification in controlling IC symptoms.

Another 2,100 IC patients responded to a survey conducted by ICA on complementary and alternative medicines—and diet topped the list. The ICA distinguished between looking for and eliminating your food triggers and strictly eliminating all the foods on some "IC Diet" food list. Results were the same, and show that **you can eat happy and healthy with a wide variety of items in your diet and still keep your symptoms at bay**. The survey also found that significantly fewer patients with longstanding IC say diet is helpful than newly diagnosed patients.

Long Island IC Diet Study

A landmark study linking IC and diet conducted by Robert Moldwin, MD and Barbara Shorter, EdD, RD was published in the peer-reviewed literature in 2009. Drs. Moldwin and Shorter developed a readable, valid, and reliable survey and administered it to 104 IC patients. The survey had general questions and a list of about 175 different items, asking whether and how the

Most Bothersome Foods for IC Patients

IC patients react differently to specific foods. Each person must figure out their individual "trigger" foods. However, in a survey of 104 patients, 90 percent reported that the following foods were bothersome:

- Caffeinated beverages
- Citrus fruits and juices
- Alcoholic beverages
- Carbonated beverages
- Tomatoes
- Foods containing hot peppers
- Certain artificial sweeteners
- Pineapple/pineapple juice
- Cranberry juice
- Horseradish
- Vinegar
- Pickled herring

item affected symptoms.

More than 90 percent of women in their study reported that certain foods and beverages bothered them. The top items were coffee, tea, soda, alcohol, citrus fruits and juices, artificial sweeteners, and hot peppers. Tomatoes weren't far behind. The paper published in the *Journal of Urology* listed 35 items that averaged at least "slightly bothersome."



Dr. Moldwin and Shorter found that **different people reacted differently**, and one person may react to one food but not to another closely related one. They also found that women who had the worst symptoms were the ones who had the greatest food sensitivities.

The research team did a similar study in men with chronic pelvic pain. Although a much lower proportion of men were affected, the top bothersome foods were essentially the same.

USF IC & Diet Study

A cross-sectional study conducted by the University of South Florida found that the interstitial cystitis diet (IC diet) does NOT have to limit the majority of foods.

Employing a web-based questionnaire, researchers asked members of the ICA, the effect of 344 foods, drinks, and supplements. About 600 patients responded—and though nearly all (96%) answered that certain foods and beverages made their IC symptoms worse, respondents also reported that they did not have a problem with most of the items on the questionnaire.

Researchers Stuart Hart, MD and Rene Bassaly, DO also concluded that IC patients may be able to reduce food sensitivities by consuming baking soda or Prelief® prior to eating one of these trigger foods.

Elimination-Challenge Diet

Where foods are concerned, whether it's an allergy or sensitivity, the treatment is the same—an elimination-challenge diet to remove the potential problem foods from your diet and add them back one at a time to see if the food really causes a problem.

Since sensitivity to specific foods can vary among individuals with IC, it is important to determine your personal IC trigger foods. Making the changes necessary for the IC diet and changing the foods you eat to help control your symptoms of IC can take time. Give yourself plenty of time—it may take several weeks of trial and error.

A key tool for an elimination diet is a food diary, which helps you to log what you are eating and track your reaction to specific foods and drinks, as well as other things which may be impacting your IC symptoms such as, stress, exercise, and medicines and other treatments.

Keeping a food diary is simple. Start by recording what foods you eat, at what time, and in what quantity, throughout the day. Record these foods in a notebook you can carry with you, print out a diary

from the internet, or use a web-based diary to keep track of your foods.

Step 1

- Eliminate suspect foods for four weeks. If you are not sure which foods that might be, start by eliminating the most bothersome foods for IC patients.
- Don't eat any of the foods or drink any of the beverages you have a positive test for or that you suspect cause you problems. No cheating!
- Although standard practice in allergy is to eliminate these items for two weeks, you can get a more definitive answer by eliminating the suspect foods longer.

Step 2

- Add foods back one at a time—one food per week. Start first with the food you miss the most, and eat all you want for one week. Don't keep going if it gives you a killer flare.
- Standard practice is three or four days, but a week helps you better identify suspect foods.
- Never introduce more than one food at a time.
- If it causes you trouble, stay away from the food. If not, keep it in your diet. Then, move on to the next food item.

Step 3

- Kiss your problem foods goodbye—for one full year.
- Sometimes, after you haven't eaten a problem food for a long time, you can lose your sensitivity to it, and you can add it back into your diet. Just go back to step 2.



The ICA is the only non-profit health association dedicated to improving the quality of healthcare and lives of people living with IC.

The ICA provides advocacy, research funding, and education to ensure early diagnosis and optimal care with dignity for people affected by IC.

Your donation dollars also enable the ICA to continue to fund new IC research projects, as well as work closely with Congress to ensure ongoing IC-specific research funding at the federal level.

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