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Tips on How to Manage Interstitial Cystitis

What Is Interstitial Cystitis (IC) ?

Cystitis is a very nonspecific term meaning inflammation or oversensitivity of the bladder. Usually the walls of bladder wall are tender and easily irritated, leading to uncomfortable symptoms. IC begins gradually and becomes progressively worse. Symptoms may go away for awhile (remission), but usually come back again. IC can occur in both men and women. Common symptoms include:

- Uncomfortable pressure over the suprapubic area or perineal pain worsening with the bladder filling and lessening with voiding
- Severe urinary urgency and frequency with a constant sensation or compulsion to void
- Painful sexual intercourse

What Are Things That I Should Avoid?

Stress can exacerbate or cause “flare-ups” of your symptoms. You should practice basic relaxation techniques, as pain relief need not be provided solely by medication. Here are some simple strategies, which may be helpful:

- Place a cold pack, heating pad or hot water directly on the perineum (area between the anus and vagina in women, and anus and scrotum in men). Experiment to determine if hot or cold works best for you.
- Taking a warm “sitz” bath with or without Epsom salts. A “sitz” bath is a small plastic container that fits over the toilet and is available in drug stores.
- Place your knees against your chest, recline with spread legs, or adopt a squatting position.

What Do I Do If I have Pain During Sex?

Sex can be a painful activity for women and men with IC. Persons will avoid sex because they are afraid of urinary frequency, pain and discomfort. Others put up with painful sex because they worry that a partner would reject them if the problem becomes an issue. Women report pain occurs because of lack of vaginal lubrication, direct stimulation to the clitoris, and during orgasm. Using any lubricants, i.e. Vitamin E oil, water-based gels, aloe vera gel, can ease pain during penetration. Having intercourse in other positions such as with the woman on top or on her hands and knees will decrease clitoral stimulation and pain. Men with IC may have difficulty with sex because of genital pain at time of erection and frequent needs to void during sex. In these cases good communication with your partner is imperative. Avoid use of latex condoms and the contraceptive diaphragm as these can cause IC symptoms.

What Can I Do When I Have an Acute IC Attack?

1. Trigger points are areas of hypersensitivity and in IC persons, trigger points can be found in areas such as the vagina, belly button, or upper thighs. Identifying and applying certain techniques to these areas may be helpful. The goal with therapeutic massage is to reduce trigger points and reeducate muscles to regain their normal motion and function.
2. Apply ice and stretch the “trigger points” in the pelvic muscle. Avoid wearing belts or clothing with waistbands because they press on the trigger point in the belly button.
3. Locating the trigger points along the piriformis muscle can assist in directing massage therapy. This muscle is found in the pelvis and upper thigh. The sacral nerves and pudendal nerves exit the pelvis through the piriformis muscle.
4. Another muscle that responds to ice massage is the abdominal muscle. Stroking the abdomen in overlapping vertical strokes from the rib cage to the pelvic bones will relieve the women’s bladder pain.

Can Changing My Diet Be Helpful?

Modification of your diet can help significantly to relieve and control symptoms and avoid flare-ups in the majority of IC cases. The idea behind curtailing your diet is to avoid foods that irritate your bladder. Following are dietary suggestions to help control IC.

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Tips on How to Manage Interstitial Cystitis (cont'd)

	Don'ts	Do's
Milk/Diary Products	aged cheeses, sour cream, yogurt and chocolate	white chocolate, non-aged cheeses such as cottage or American, frozen yogurt and milk
Vegetables	fava beans, lima beans, onions, tofu, spinach and tomatoes	All other vegetables and home grown tomatoes
Fruits	apples, apricots, avocados, bananas, cantaloupes, citrus fruits, cranberries, grapes, nectarines, peaches, pineapples, plums, pomegranates, rhubarb, strawberries and juices made from these fruits	melons and pears
Carbohydrates and Grains	rye and sourdough bread	Other breads, pasta, potatoes and rice
Meats and Fish	aged canned, cured, processed smoked meats and fish, anchovies, caviar, chicken livers, corned beef, and meats which contain nitrates or nitrites	Other poultry, fish and meat
Nuts	most nuts	almonds, cashews and pine nuts
Beverages	alcoholic beverages, beer, carbonated, acid-free coffee and tea, and some herbal teas	bottled or spring water, decaffeinated, acid-free coffee and tea, and some herbal teas
<i>Seasonings</i>	mayonnaise, miso, spicy foods (especially ethnic foods as Chinese, Indian, Mexican and Thai..), soy sauce, salad dressing and	garlic and other seasonings
Preservatives and Additives	benzol alcohol, citric acid, monosodium glutamate, aspartame (Nutrasweet), saccharine, foods containing preservatives and artificial ingredients and colors.	
Misc	tobacco, caffeine, diet pills junk foods, recreational drugs, cold and allergy medications containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine and certain vitamins, B complex, which may contain fillers	