

Interstitial cystitis (in-tur-STISH-ul sis-TIE-tis), also called painful bladder syndrome, is a chronic condition characterised by bladder pressure, bladder pain and sometimes pelvic pain, from mild discomfort to severe.

The bladder is a hollow, muscular organ that stores urine which expands until it's full and then signals your brain through pelvic nerves. With interstitial cystitis (IC), these signals get mixed up, creating an urge to urinate more often with smaller volumes of urine.

What are the usual symptoms?

- ∂ Pain in your pelvis or between the vagina and anus in women.
- ∂ A burning or stinging pain in the urethra.
- ∂ Chronic pelvic pain.
- ∂ A persistent, urgent need to urinate.
- ∂ Frequent urination, often of small amounts, throughout the day and night – in a severe case as often as 60 times a day.
- ∂ Pain or discomfort while the bladder fills, and relief after urinating.
- ∂ Pain during intercourse.

The signs and symptoms vary from person to person and may also vary over time, including flares in response to common triggers, such as menstruation, sitting for a long time, stress, exercise and sexual activity.

Although signs and symptoms of IC may resemble those of a chronic urinary tract infection, urine cultures are usually free of bacteria.

Causes

It's likely many factors are at play, such as a defect in the epithelium (protective lining) of the bladder, allowing urine to irritate the bladder wall. Other suggested factors that may contribute to interstitial cystitis include an autoimmune reaction, heredity, infection or allergy.

Risk factors

These factors are associated with a higher risk of IC:

- ∂ Gender: Women are diagnosed with IC more often than men.
- ∂ Age: Most people with IC are diagnosed during their 30s or older.
- ∂ Having a chronic pain disorder. Interstitial cystitis may be associated with having another chronic pain disorder, such as endometriosis, IBS or fibromyalgia.

Impacts

Interstitial cystitis can result in wide impacts, including:

- **Reduced bladder capacity:** IC can lead to a stiffening of the wall of your bladder, causing reduced bladder capacity.
- **Interrupted Sleep:** The need to urinate during the night can wreak havoc with normal sleep patterns, causing tiredness.
- **Lower quality of life:** Frequent urination and pain may interfere with social activities, work and daily life.
- **Sexual intimacy problems:** Frequent urination and pain may strain personal relationships, with intimacy commonly affected.
- **Emotional troubles:** Chronic pain and interrupted sleep may cause emotional stress and may lead to depression.

What should I do if I think I have IC?

Use this quiz to help you decide if you need to seek medical advice:

- Do you feel the urge to urinate with little or no warning?
- Do you feel the urge to urinate immediately after you've urinated?
- Do you ever urinate less than two hours after you finished urinating?
- Do you wake up at night to urinate?
- Do you have pain or burning in your bladder?
- Do you feel pain in your abdomen or pelvis?

If you're experiencing chronic bladder pain or urinary urgency and frequency, take this checklist to your GP to discuss your symptoms. You may need a referral to a urologist.

What can help?

Eliminating or reducing foods that are potential bladder irritants may help to relieve discomfort. Common bladder irritants (known as the 'Four C's') include: Carbonated beverages (soft drinks), Caffeine, Citrus products and foods high in vitamin C. Reducing foods such as tomatoes, pickled foods, alcohol and spices may help. Artificial sweeteners may aggravate symptoms in some people. A physical therapist may be able to help with pelvic floor muscles and connective tissues.

Suggested Reading:

- Wikipedia and Mayo Clinic articles found by searching for Interstitial Cystitis.
- The IC Network: <http://www.ic-network.com/>
- Insight Endometriosis Fact Sheet on Symptom Diaries

Source: Adapted from information from the Mayo Clinic website

For more information: visit www.InsightEndometriosis.org.nz or [www.Facebook.com/InsightEndometriosis](https://www.facebook.com/InsightEndometriosis) or contact our Educator, Annette ph 07 8555 123 | email info@InsightEndometriosis.org.nz | FB message.
