

Interstitial Cystitis/Bladder Pain Syndrome

What You Should Know



What is Interstitial Cystitis (IC) or Bladder Pain Syndrome (BPS)?

Interstitial Cystitis (IC) or Bladder Pain Syndrome (BPS) is a long-term problem with bladder pain. It is not an infection, but it can feel like one. It is a feeling of discomfort and pressure in the bladder area. This pressure or pain can last for six weeks or more with no clear cause. There can also be signs like a regular, urgent need to pass urine.

What are the causes and symptoms of IC/BPS?

It is not clear exactly what causes IC/BPS, but there are many ideas. It could be from:

- Something in the urine that damages the bladder
- White blood cells that cause an allergic reaction
- Changes in the nerves that carry bladder sensations
- Something that causes the immune system to attack the bladder
- A family history of painful bladder

The most common symptom of IC/BPS is pain in the lower abdomen or lower back. It can get worse as the bladder fills. Women may also feel pain in the vulva or vagina. Men may feel pain in the scrotum, testicle, penis or rectal area. Another problem is urinary frequency (needing to pass urine more than seven times, day and night). Some people feel the need to pass urine all the time. Some people also have bowel problems.

How is IC/BPS diagnosed?

There is no medical test that says a person has IC/BPS or not. Your doctor will first decide if your symptoms seem like IC/BPS.

Next, they'll test to see if an infection or something else is causing your symptoms. When no other serious issues are found, your doctor may then diagnose you with IC/BPS.

How is IC/BPS treated?

The goal of IC/BPS treatment is to control your symptoms. A combination of lifestyle changes and medical options should be tried until you find relief. However, these steps can take a long time until you feel better, so patience is encouraged. You may be given the name of a specialist/urologist who is an expert in IC/BPS.

- **Lifestyle Changes.** These may include physical therapy, stress reduction and dietary changes. Some foods and beverages can irritate the bladder and should be limited. These include citrus, tomatoes, coffee, chocolate, spicy foods and alcohol. Kegel exercises are not recommended if you have IC/BPS. Kegels may make your pelvic floor pain worse.
- **Medications.** If lifestyle changes don't help enough, your doctor may offer one or more prescription drugs. Sometimes herbal supplements are recommended.
- **Cystoscopy with Hydrodistention.** This procedure fills the bladder with water to stretch it to full capacity. If ulcers are seen, they can be burned off with electricity or with a laser.
- **Neuromodulation Therapy.** This group of treatments delivers electrical impulses to nerves going to and from the bladder to change how they work.
- **Injections of Botox®.** Botox® injections can control symptoms by paralyzing muscles to reduce how often you go to the bathroom.

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- **Major Surgery.** Major surgery is only offered when there are major bladder symptoms and other treatment options haven't helped.

Can IC/BPS be cured?

IC/BPS symptoms slowly get better for some patients and may even disappear with treatment. Many people find symptoms come and go over the years. With pain management, most people find that they can live comfortably. To prevent the return of symptoms, you may choose to:

- Stay on your treatment plan even after feeling better
- Avoid foods that may irritate the bladder
- Avoid activities that may make IC/BPS worse
- Learn stress management

Questions to ask your doctor

- What treatment plan do you recommend for me and why?
- What can I do about my chronic pain?
- Will IC/BPS affect other parts of my body?
- Does drinking less water help?
- How can I avoid flare-ups?
- How are bladder spasms treated?
- Will an antidepressant help me?
- Where can I go for more information and support?
- Can I have IC/BPS and still be intimate?
- What is the long-term treatment plan for me?
- Will I ever be cured?

About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts. To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions** or go to **UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist** to find a doctor near you.

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