What Is Interstitial Cystitis?

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Fibromyalgia and Interstitial Cystitis

There are so many other medical conditions that can develop along with fibromyalgia, and interstitial cystitis (IC) is just one of them. IC is an inflammation of the bladder that can be mild, or become debilitating and interfere with daily activities. Women are 10 times more likely to develop IC compared to men.

This health issue is often unrecognized and therefore typically left untreated. Let’s understand the symptoms and what the treatment options are.

Symptoms of Interstitial Cystitis

IC may develop before fibromyalgia in some cases, but most often will occur in the third or fourth decade of life, after fibromyalgia is diagnosed. The exact reason why these two conditions can be found together is not exactly known, but scientists believe a chronic infection may be the underlying problem and pain originates in the nerves in both diseases.

Hormonal (female hormones) and anatomical specifics (shorter urethra) may explain why IC and fibromyalgia are more common in women.

IC mimics a common urinary tract infection — a person would typically experience severe pain in the pelvis and burning during urination that simply doesn’t go away. Pain and burning can be experienced during sexual intercourse, as well as in the abdomen or groin.

Urgency (feeling the need to urinate right away) and frequency (going frequently, more than eight times a day to the bathroom) are also common. IC in men may cause pain in the testes and scrotum and ejaculation problems.

The symptoms can start without an obvious reason, or after an infection or surgery in the pelvis. Some people will experience flare-ups from time to time. Lab analysis of the urine would show no signs of infection, and trying antibiotic treatment does not help.

A doctor will also try to rule out other bladder conditions (cancer, inflammation) with various tests (urine cytology and bladder biopsy). Pinpoint hemorrhages or small patches called Hunner’s lesions suggest the diagnosis of IC.

Hydroextension (a procedure during which the bladder is filled with water) can help detect possible sources of bleeding.

Management

The symptoms persist for a long time, and the treatment will be individualized from case to case.

Bladder training can be helpful, because a person can learn techniques to train the bladder and go to the bathroom during certain times. Muscle spasms can be improved with physical therapy and biofeedback. Some medicines are directly injected in the bladder, while other taken orally (antidepressants, prescription painkillers and pentosan).

When everything else fails, surgery is used as a last resort.

IC has been linked with some trigger foods or food sensitivities that usually aggravate the symptoms. The foods that cause troubles include coffee and other caffeine based drinks, citric fruits, tomatoes and alcohol. Other acidic foods should be avoided as well.

Hydration is important because it stimulates the optimal function of the urinary tract, but you should not drink too much water before bed time.

Staying active is important because exercise improves the blood flow in the bladder, promoting repair and decreased inflammation. The most beneficial exercises include low impact aerobics, tai chi, Pilates, walking and yoga.

Stress is a well-known trigger for both interstitial cystitis and fibromyalgia, and symptoms can be significantly reduced with meditation, breathing techniques, self-hypnosis, massage or psychotherapy.

Natural supplements that can help improve symptoms of IC (and also boost the immune system and decrease inflammation) include probiotics, and the herbs Ashwagandha and Quercetin. All of these supplements may ameliorate some symptoms of fibromyalgia as well.