

Interstitial Cystitis and Diet

Interstitial cystitis (IC) is a condition that is difficult to diagnose and treat. People with IC may need to urinate frequently, feel an urgent need to urinate, and/or have bladder or pelvic pressure. Symptoms vary from person to person, and may come and go for each person. The cause of IC, sometimes called painful bladder syndrome (PBS), is not known, but it is not caused by bacteria, such as a urinary tract infection. Antibiotics are not effective in treating IC.

Treating IC

Doctors use medication, lifestyle changes, such as smoking cessation, and dietary changes to help treat IC. Sometimes doctors will stretch the bladder or perform other bladder treatments. Surgery is performed in rare cases and as a last resort.

Diet and IC

Scientists can not prove an IC/food connection, but many doctors and patients believe one exists. Because symptoms can come and go, it often is difficult to pinpoint any foods that make symptoms worse. Certain foods may trigger symptoms; so, avoiding those foods might help. However, foods that bother you might not bother someone else. That is why dietary changes are individualized. Although your doctor might give you a list of foods to avoid, it is best to try to find your personal trigger foods, if you have any. That way you will not need to avoid foods or groups of foods for no reason.

The following foods may cause bladder irritation:

- Alcohol
- Tomatoes
- Spices
- Chocolate
- Caffeinated beverages
- Citrus beverages
- High-acid foods

According to a recent study on IC, the most frequently reported and most bothersome foods were:

- Coffee
- Tea
- Soda
- Alcoholic beverages
- Citrus fruits
- Citrus juices
- Artificial sweeteners
- Hot pepper

Some people report they can eat small amounts of certain foods, but eating too much will make their symptoms worse. Any food has the potential to cause irritation; so, you may have a different “trigger food” than another IC patient.

A registered dietitian can help you identify foods that make your symptoms worse. An elimination diet (you eliminate foods that might cause a problem, add one food back at a time, and keep a diary of symptoms to see if you can connect foods with symptoms) probably will help. If you find that an entire group of foods makes your symptoms worse, you may need to avoid those foods. Your dietitian will help you make sure you avoid your trigger foods, but also include all the nutrients you need for good health.

Cranberry juice

Cranberry juice is actually acidic and a trigger food for some people. This is sometimes confusing to IC patients, because cranberry juice often is recommended when you have a urinary tract infection. Because IC is not an infection, but an irritation, acidic foods, such as cranberry juice, will not help IC and might make it worse. If you drink cranberry juice, avoid it for a few days and see if you notice any difference in your symptoms.

References:

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