

Bladder Pain

Bladder pain syndrome (also called interstitial cystitis or painful bladder syndrome) is a chronic (long-term) pain condition that affects the bladder. Your bladder is the organ that holds urine from the kidneys until the urine travels down the urethra and out of the body. Bladder pain syndrome affects more women than men. There is no cure, but there is treatment to help relieve your symptoms, including pain. Sometimes symptoms get better without treatment.

Q: What are the symptoms of bladder pain syndrome?

A: Symptoms of bladder pain syndrome can include:

- Pain or discomfort in the lower abdomen. Pain may get worse as the bladder fills up. Your pain may go away for a short time when you urinate and empty the bladder.
- Feeling like you need to urinate right away (urgency), often (frequency), or both. Most people urinate between four and seven times a day. People with severe bladder pain syndrome may urinate as often as 40 times a day, including during the night.
- Pain, pressure, or tenderness in the bladder, urethra, vulva, vagina, or rectum
- Pain in the muscles of the pelvic floor, lower abdomen, and lower back
- Pain that may get worse during your menstrual period
- Pain during sexual intercourse
- Ulcers, sores, and/or bleeding in the bladder

Q: How does bladder pain syndrome affect a woman's health?

A: Some women with bladder pain syndrome may feel only mild discomfort from symptoms. Others have severe pain and symptoms. Symptoms can also change over time.

Some ways that severe symptoms of bladder pain syndrome may affect a woman's health include:

- **Lack of high-quality sleep.** Women with severe symptoms might get up throughout the night to urinate. Interrupted sleep can lead to extreme fatigue and sometimes depression.
- **Depression.** Living with a chronic pain condition raises your risk of depression.
- **Pain during sex.** Many women with bladder pain syndrome report pain during sex. Studies show that women with bladder pain syndrome may also have problems with becoming sexually aroused, vaginal dryness, and reaching orgasm.

Q: How is bladder pain syndrome treated?

A: There is no cure for bladder pain syndrome. But your doctor will try different treatments to figure out how to improve your symptoms.

The first treatment many people try includes steps you can take at home, such as quitting smoking and bladder training (training your bladder to go longer between bathroom visits). Sometimes, changing what you eat, such as avoiding alcohol, caffeine, or spicy foods, can help make your symptoms go away. But even when symptoms do go away, they may return days or years later.

If your symptoms do not get better, other treatments your doctor may suggest include:

- **Physical therapy.** You can work with a physical therapist to learn strengthening and relaxation techniques.
- **Over-the-counter pain relievers.** Aspirin or ibuprofen may help with mild bladder pain.
- **Prescription medicines.** Your doctor can prescribe medicines that may relieve pain and lessen the need to urinate.

- **Bladder instillation, also called a bladder bath.** Your doctor uses a catheter to fill your bladder with a liquid or solution. The liquid washes the inside of your bladder for about 15 minutes before it is emptied. The bladder bath may help prevent muscle spasms that cause bladder pain and the need to urinate.
- **Nerve stimulation.** Your doctor uses wires to send mild electric pulses to nerves in the bladder. The pulses may increase blood flow to the bladder and strengthen the muscles that help control the bladder. This may relieve pain and lessen the need to urinate as often.
- **Botox injections.** Your doctor injects botulinum toxin (Botox) into the muscle in the bladder lining to help the bladder relax and store more urine, or into the pelvic floor muscles if they are in spasm.
- **Surgery.** If other treatments have not worked, your doctor may suggest surgery to remove the bladder or parts of the bladder. You may still have pain after surgery. An ulcer in the bladder can be treated with a simple surgery that may relieve symptoms for many months. If you have your bladder taken out, you will have to use a bag outside of your body to collect and dispose of urine.

For more information...

For more information about bladder pain syndrome, call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), NIH, HHS**
Phone Number: 301-496-3583
www.niddk.nih.gov
- **American Chronic Pain Association**
Phone Number: 800-533-3231
www.theacpa.org
- **Urology Care Foundation**
Phone Number: 866-746-4282
www.urologyhealth.org
- **Interstitial Cystitis Association**
Phone Number: 800-435-7422
www.ichelp.org
- **Interstitial Cystitis Network**
Phone Number: 800-928-7496
www.ic-network.com

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