



Lancashire Gynaecologist

Eric Mutema

Interstitial Cystitis (IC)

Interstitial Cystitis (IC): understanding, causes, treatments and self-help

Interstitial Cystitis (IC), is a chronic condition characterised by bladder pressure, pelvic pain, and discomfort that lasts for weeks to months. It can affect your daily life, sleep and activities, but with accurate diagnosis and a tailored management plan, many people experience meaningful relief. This article provides an overview for patients, with clear explanations of what IC is, possible causes, how it's diagnosed, treatment options and practical self-help strategies.



What is IC?

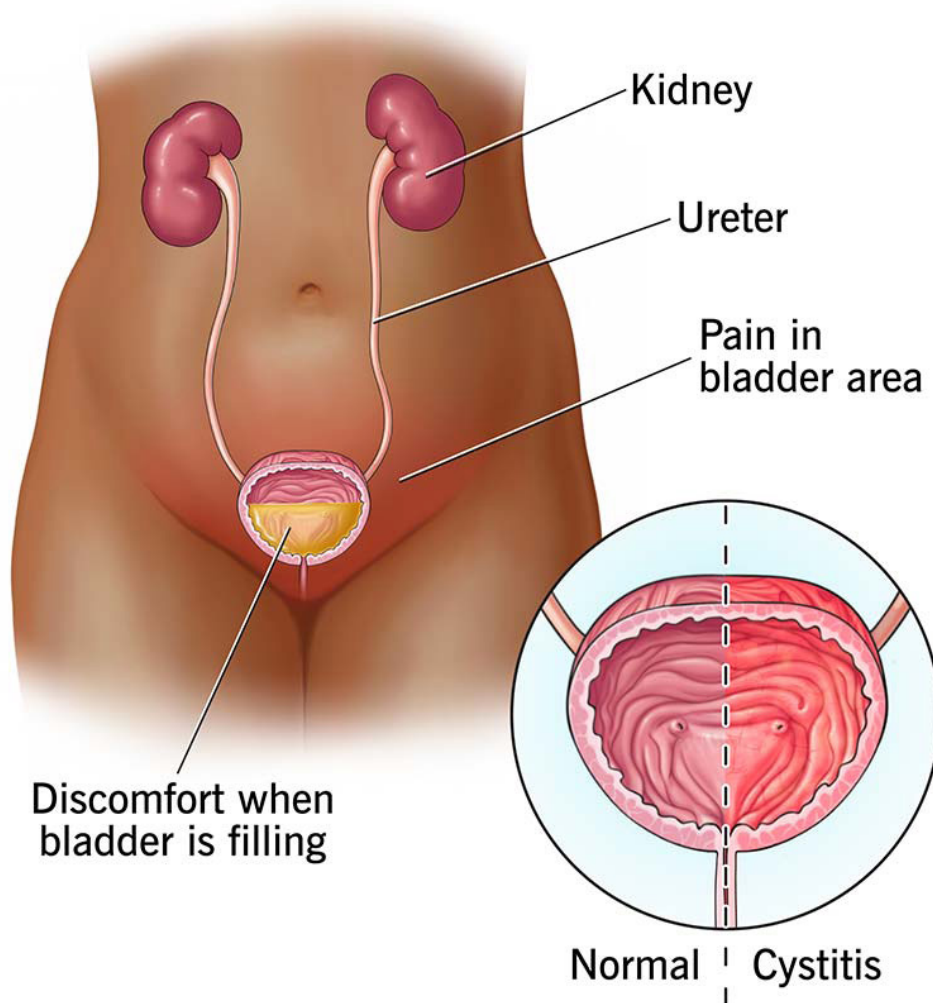
IC is a condition characterised by bladder-related pain or pressure, often accompanied by frequent urination and urgent need to urinate.

Symptoms may include:

- Chronic pelvic or bladder pain that lasts for several weeks to months.
 - Pain worse with bladder filling and relieved by emptying (though not always).
 - Increased urination frequency (often more than 8 times in 24 hours).
 - Urgency to urinate, sometimes interfering with daily life and sleep
- IC is a diagnosis of exclusion, meaning other causes of bladder symptoms (such as infections, stones, or overactive bladder) are ruled out or treated first.

Interstitial cystitis

Bladder pain syndrome



Causes and risk factors

The exact cause of IC is not fully understood. It is likely multifactorial, with several theories supported by research:

- **Bladder lining (epithelial) defects:** Damage to the protective lining of the bladder may allow irritants in urine to affect deeper bladder tissues.
- **Inflammation or autoimmune processes:** Some individuals show signs of inflammation or an immune-related mechanism.
- **Nerve dysfunction:** Abnormal signalling between the bladder and the brain may amplify pain and urinary symptoms.
- **Mast cell activation:** Release of inflammatory substances from mast cells could contribute to symptoms.
- **Genetic and environmental factors:** A combination of genetics, infections, or trauma may influence susceptibility in some people.

Sometimes, Bladder Pain Syndrome (BPS) can be caused by IC.

Risk factors observed in some studies include chronic pelvic pain conditions, anxiety or mood disorders, and a history of urinary tract infections but IC can affect anyone.

How IC is diagnosed

Diagnosis typically involves a careful history and physical examination. Urinalysis and urine culture to exclude infection. In some cases, an ultrasound may be required to rule out other conditions.

In some instances, a cystoscopy with hydrodistension (a procedure to look inside the bladder) may be used, particularly if initial treatments haven't helped or to assess bladder capacity. There is no single test that confirms IC; diagnosis often relies on symptom patterns and the exclusion of other causes.

Management and treatment options

Treatment is highly individualised. Many people benefit from a combination approach addressing symptoms, bladder health and quality of life. Treatments can be grouped as lifestyle, medical and in some cases, procedural interventions.

1) Lifestyle and self-management

Here are a few hints and tips to help you manage the condition at home:

- **Fluid management:** Find a balance to avoid over-distension of the bladder while staying hydrated. Avoid excessive caffeine, alcohol, artificial sweeteners, and citrus juices if these irritate your bladder.
- **Bladder training:** Gradually increasing the intervals between bathroom visits can help some people reduce urgency.
- **Diet modifications:** Some individuals report symptom improvement with certain dietary changes (e.g. identifying and avoiding trigger foods like spicy foods, acidic fruits, or artificial additives). A trial-and-error approach can help.
- **Stress reduction and sleep:** Techniques such as mindfulness, breathing exercises, yoga, and adequate sleep can improve overall well-being and may help with symptom perception.
- **Pelvic floor therapy:** Pelvic floor physical therapy can help relieve pelvic floor muscle tension that may contribute to pain. See: [Emsella or Ultra Tesla chair – Lancashire Gynaecologist](#) and [Perifit Care+ – Lancashire Gynaecologist](#)

2) Medical treatments

- **Oral medications:** Speak to your GP for the right oral medication for your symptoms
- **Bladder instillations:** Treatments delivered directly into the bladder (can provide symptom relief for some people. You can find out more on here: [Bladder Installation – Lancashire Gynaecologist](#))
- **Non-hormonal analgesics:** Acetaminophen or NSAIDs may be used for short periods if appropriate, under medical advice.
- **Neuromodulation and nerve-targeted therapies:** For some individuals, therapies targeting nerve signalling (e.g. sacral nerve stimulation) may be considered.
- **Cystoscopy with hydrodistension:** A diagnostic and sometimes therapeutic procedure performed by a urology or gynaecology specialist such as the Lancashire Gynaecologist may help in select cases.

It is worth noting here that the effectiveness of treatments varies widely between individuals. A clinician experienced consultant from the Lancashire Gynaecologist team can help you weigh benefits, risks and practical considerations.

For those of you who have been diagnosed with Bladder Pain Syndrome, treatment is likely to be the same



When to seek urgent care

If you experience fever, severe abdominal pain, vomiting, or a sudden inability to urinate, seek urgent medical attention as these could indicate other conditions.

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The Lancashire Gynaecologist?

Mr Eric Mutema is a highly experienced and respected Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist. He founded his private practice, the Lancashire Gynaecologist, to provide a service to women in Lancashire and beyond and respond to the shortage of specialist gynaecological services available to women missing out on individualised care and treatment. The Lancashire Gynaecologist offers patients individual attention, an empathetic, compassionate approach and patient-centred care. His patients will receive a full consultation that takes their overall health into account and subsequent treatments will be tailored to meet the needs of the individual woman. So please don't wait and put off seeking treatment; we're available, convenient and we can help you.



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