

## OB-GYN ASSOCIATES, P.A.

# INTERSTITIAL CYSTITIS

Interstitial Cystitis (IC) is a chronic inflammatory condition of the bladder that causes frequent, urgent, and painful urination and pelvic discomfort. No infectious agent has been found in IC. The natural lining of the bladder (epithelium) is protected from toxins in the urine by a layer of protein called glycoaminoglycan (GAG). In IC this protective layer has broken down, allowing toxins to irritate the bladder wall. The bladder then becomes inflamed and tender and does not store urine well. IC usually starts slowly and gets worse as time goes on. Although there is no cure for IC, it is treatable.

In 1991 an estimated 750,000 people in the United States, 90% of which are women had been diagnosed with IC. In 2005, it is thought that between 9 million and 14 million people have chronic pelvic pain that may be due to IC. The average age of onset is 40 years.

IC is a poorly understood disease with unknown causes. Although no bacteria or viruses have been found in the urine of IC sufferers, an unidentified infectious agent may be the cause. Some believe that IC occurs with ischemia (tissue death) or a deficiency of GAG in the epithelium. Just as there is no one symptom common to all women with IC, there is no single test that can tell for sure if you have IC. One test that may be done to aid in diagnoses is the "Potassium test" in which a potassium solution is inserted in the bladder through a thin, flexible tube. The pain from the potassium solution suggests a diagnosis of IC. A cystoscopy may also be done. This is a procedure in which a physician can look directly into the bladder with a lighted scope. If small spots of blood are noted under the bladder wall, IC is suspected.

Treatments are primarily focused on relieving symptoms, and may include:

- 1) Bladder distention- a procedure aimed at increasing bladder capacity and interfering with pain signals that are being transmitted by the nerve cells in the bladder.
- 2) Medications

- 3) TENS- transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation- mild, electric pulses enter the body for minutes to hours, two or more times a day either through wires placed on the lower back, or through special devices inserted into the vagina.
- 4) Bladder training- a patient empties her bladder at designated times and uses relaxation techniques and distractions to help keep to the schedule. Gradually the patient tries to lengthen the time between voids.
- 5) Diet modification- Foods thought to contribute to bladder inflammation and need to be avoided are- tomatoes, alcohol, spices, chocolate, caffeinated and citrus beverages.
- 6) Smoking is a major known cause of bladder cancer.

Interstitial cystitis is one of the most common bladder conditions associated with Chronic Pelvic Pain. It is best to diagnose the problem early to prevent more damage to the bladder and shorten the negative impact of IC on the quality of life.