

Diet Suggestions: Do's and Don'ts

The idea behind managing your diet is to avoid foods and beverages that may irritate your bladder. Here is a list of some of the suggested items to restrict, followed by foods and beverages that a number of IC patients have noted do not cause them problems.



Milk/Dairy Products

Avoid: aged cheeses, sour cream, yogurt and chocolate.

Okay to try: white chocolate, non-aged cheeses such as cottage or American, frozen yogurt and milk.



Vegetables

Avoid: fava beans, lima beans, onions, tofu, soy beans & soy-based products, and tomatoes.

Okay to try: other vegetables, beans, green onions/chives, and home grown tomatoes (which may be less acidic).



Fruits

Avoid: apples, apricots, avocados, bananas, cantaloupes, citrus fruits, cranberries, grapes, nectarines, peaches, pineapples, plums, pomegranates, rhubarb, strawberries and juices made from these fruits.

Okay to try: melons (other than cantaloupes), blueberries and pears.



Carbohydrates and Grains

Avoid: rye and sourdough bread.

Okay to try: other breads, pasta, potatoes and rice.



Meats and Fish

Avoid: aged, canned, cured, processed or smoked meats and fish, anchovies, caviar, chicken livers, corned beef, and meats that contain nitrates or nitrites.

Okay to try: other poultry, fish and meat.

Nuts

Avoid: most nuts.

Okay to try: almonds, cashews and pine nuts.



Beverages

Avoid: alcoholic beverages (including beer and wine); carbonated drinks, such as sodas; coffee or tea; and fruit juices, especially citrus or cranberry juice.

Okay to try: non-carbonated bottled water, decaffeinated, acid-free coffee and tea, and some herbal teas.



Seasonings

Avoid: mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, salsa, spicy foods (especially such ethnic foods as Chinese, Indian, Mexican and Thai), soy sauce, miso, other soy-based condiments, salad dressing and vinegar, including balsamic and flavored vinegars.

Okay to try: garlic and other seasonings.

Preservatives and Additives

Avoid: benzol alcohol, citric acid, monosodium glutamate (MSG), artificial sweeteners such as aspartame (Nutrasweet®) and saccharine, foods containing preservatives and artificial ingredients and colors.

Miscellaneous

Avoid: tobacco, caffeine, diet pills, junk foods, recreational drugs, cold and allergy medications containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, and certain vitamins.

Although the list of foods to avoid may initially appear daunting, remember that there are still many foods you can enjoy. Some IC patients report that they have the least trouble with lightly seasoned rice, potatoes, pasta, vegetables, meat, and chicken. With these foods as a base for your diet, you can create nutritious and flavorful meals. You can still cook for family and friends and share meals with them because the foods you can eat are the basic elements of a healthful, balanced diet. However, you may need to make some minor adjustments, such as setting your serving aside before adding stronger seasonings. You may also want to consider adding a source of fiber to your diet to promote regular bowel movements.

Suggestions

With some imaginative effort, you should be able to come up with substitutions for your favorite foods and drinks which will not aggravate your symptoms. Here are a few suggestions:

- Learn to read labels. Ordinarily, the fewer ingredients in a product, the safer it is likely to be.
- Add a pinch of salt to carbonated beverages to make them flat.
- Try reduced-acid orange juice now available in supermarkets.
- Try Prelief®, a dietary supplement containing calcium glycerophosphate, which has been shown in research studies on IC patients to help reduce bladder pain and urinary urgency when used with acidic foods and beverages. For more information, call 1-800-994-4711 or go to www.prelief.com.
- Try Cysta-Q® and Prosta-Q®, dietary supplements that have been shown in clinical studies to reduce the urinary urgency, frequency, and pain of IC and nonbacterial prostatitis. For more information, call 1-877-284-3976 or visit www.cystaq.com or www.prostaq.com.
- Boil down all sauces containing alcohol.

Dining Out

Once you have determined which foods cause you trouble, you should be able to eat in restaurants or at social gatherings without too much difficulty. You will simply need to ask about ingredients or stay away from dishes where ingredients are hard to discern. Spicy ethnic foods can pose a problem when dining out because the spices used may cause the release of trouble-making histamines. The ingredients in these dishes are often difficult to determine as well. Before ordering, ask your waiter what spices are used in particular dishes.

Food Allergies

Doctors find that some IC patients have additional symptoms that are caused by food allergies. Allergies to wheat, corn, rye, oats and barley are common. Other patients with milk allergies and lactose intolerance may experience a severe response to these foods. Although the existence of systemic

Living with interstitial cystitis (IC) is a challenge that requires creativity, patience and determination. Because there is no cure for IC or an effective treatment that works for everyone, people with IC discover that they must take an active role in managing their lives. What follows is a variety of suggestions to help you live with IC on a daily basis, compiled from questionnaires completed by IC patients and their doctors, and publications available through the Interstitial Cystitis Association (ICA).

Diet

Many IC patients find that diet plays an important role in helping them control the condition and avoid flares-ups. Others note that what they eat or drink seems to have no effect on how they feel. If you have not tried modifying your diet, it is worth experimenting with different foods and beverages to see if this works for you. The most common suggestions from IC patients are:

- Avoid beer, wine, alcohol, caffeine, fruits, aged cheeses, yeast, cured or processed meats, artificial sweeteners and carbonated beverages. Substitute decaffeinated, reduced-acid, teas and coffees. Drink non-carbonated bottled water instead of tap water
- Follow a low-acid diet, eliminating such foods as tomatoes, vinegar, mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, and fruits and juices, or products that contain these ingredients
- Avoid spicy foods and chocolate (which contains caffeine)
- Add fiber to your diet to promote regular bowel movements
- Do not smoke
- Eat several small meals instead of one large one
- Try Prelief®, a dietary supplement containing calcium glycerophosphate, which has been shown in research studies on IC patients to help reduce bladder pain and urinary urgency when used with acidic foods and beverages. For more information, call 1-800-994-4711 or go to www.prelief.com.
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Exercise

When you are in discomfort or pain, or tired from nights of disrupted sleep, you may find it difficult to exercise. IC patients with severe symptoms know that even the gentlest movement can make them uncomfortable. Yet many people with IC, even those seriously affected, do make the effort to engage in some form of exercise and report feeling better physically and psychologically as a result.

Try these gentle exercises:

- Low impact aerobics
- Walking
- Yoga
- Tai Chi
- The Body Recall system developed for the elderly and disabled, which includes a range of exercises that can be done in bed.

Reducing Stress

Most people with IC recognize that stress plays a part in exacerbating symptoms or bringing on flare-ups. Simply dealing with having IC and the accompanying symptoms can be a source of stress in itself. In addition to using regular exercise to combat stress and relieve pain, IC patients suggest:

- Learning basic relaxation techniques
- Using meditation tapes and/or visualization
- Learning self-hypnosis
- Receiving massages
- Psychotherapy to learn coping skills and stress-reduction techniques

Pain Relief

Many IC patients find at least partial pain relief in simple strategies that can be done at home. These include:

- Placing a cold pack, heating pad or hot water bottle directly on the perineum (area between the anus and vagina in women, and anus and base of penis in men). Experiment to see whether cold or heat works best
- Taking a warm sitz bath, with or without Epsom salts – draw a small amount of water into the bathtub or use a plastic sitz bath (available at drug stores), which fits over the toilet
- Placing your knees against your chest, reclining with spread legs or adopting a squatting position

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- Drink a glass of water mixed with one teaspoon of baking soda. Consult your doctor before taking if you are on a salt-restricted diet

Sexuality

For most IC patients, the difficulty they experience engaging in and enjoying sexual activity is one of IC's more debilitating aspects. However, IC does not have to bring an end to your sex life. By taking a creative approach and remaining open to alternatives, many IC patients have found ways to be intimate and loving.

Instead of defining sex exclusively as intercourse, think of sex as a range of activities that can include oral-genital sex, massage, mutual masturbation, sharing fantasies, and simply holding and being held.

Use of antispasmodic or pain-reducing medications before sex and lubricants during intercourse can reduce discomfort. Avoid use of a diaphragm because it puts pressure on the bladder. To reduce pain the next day, take a 20-minute sitz bath and place an ice pack on the perineum for 20 minutes after sexual activity.

Working with a trained sexual therapist, especially someone with experience with the chronically ill and disabled, can be helpful.

Clothing

Wearing clothes that are comfortable and non-restrictive can help provide basic relief for IC patients. Unfortunately, "women's" clothing is not always designed with comfort in mind, but with persistence and ingenuity, women with IC can create a wardrobe that is both fashionable and serviceable. Here are some suggestions:

- Wear loose clothing such as full skirts and loose pants
- Avoid belts and clothing that put pressure on the waist and abdomen
- Try thigh-high stockings, cotton leggings or cotton tights
- Wear cotton underwear
- Wear low-heeled shoes or slippers to relieve lower back pain. Consider a soft rubbery sole to minimize impact. Use foam inserts in shoes for additional cushioning