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Hormonal Balance & Wellness

Bladder Diet

Many times, a change in diet can cause significant positive changes in bladder habits and lifestyle. Read this and see if this information can help you return to a more normal and active life.

The five worst foods

These foods win our vote as the biggest misery makers for people with OVERACTIVE BLADDER, URGE INCONTINENCE AND OTHER BLADDER CONDITIONS! These are the foods commonly seen that cause problems in patients all the time. Of course, just because they cause trouble for so many others, that doesn't guarantee they'll make you miserable, too. But if you do eat these, watch out! Be sure to pay close attention to how you feel afterwards. If you feel worse, then there is a good chance that this is a trigger food for you. Information is power. Whenever possible, talk with other patients and compare your trigger foods. They may help you discover some hidden triggers in your own diet.

#1: Cranberry juice, citric beverages such as orange juice, lemon, lime (even cranberry tablets)

Otherwise known as the ACID BOMB when it hits, cranberry juice may be the biggest bladder irritant in a patient's diet. It's often recommended for consumption during urinary tract infections because it is believed to have substances in it that help keep bacteria from sticking to the bladder wall. (If they can't stick, they can't infect. They just get flushed out). But cranberry juice can be difficult for a bladder to tolerate. If you've got to have it, try diluting it by half or more!

#2: Coffee and tea (or anything with caffeine)

Yes, we know that "lattes" and other coffee products are all the rage these days. However, in a sensitive bladder, the caffeine and tannins in coffee have little competition for causing intense irritation. Some people can tolerate low-acid decaf coffees, while others try (less caffeinated) teas. But for the most sensitive patient, by far the safest option for a hot drink in the morning is hot water and honey.

#3: Carbonated beverages (even if decaffeinated)

Whether it be plain carbonated Perrier water or flavored sodas, patients often complain about their effects on the bladder. The biggest problem appears to be the acid, though most flavored sodas also have big doses of caffeine. The most difficult carbonated beverage for a bladder to tolerate appears to be diet cola. Diet colas are a quadruple whammy of acidic carbonation, citric and other acids, caffeine, and artificial sweeteners -- four well-known bladder irritants. Taken all at once it can be a bladder's nightmare! If you must have a soda, try a non-diet, usually non-caffeinated, root beer-- and load the cup with plenty of ice to dilute it!

#4: Tomatoes, Oranges, Lemon/Lime

They're found in so many foods these days, tomatoes and tomato products are darn hard to avoid. Though we think of them as mild-mannered vegetables, those tempting red globes are really a very acidic fruit. A few bladder patients can tolerate tomato sauces on pizzas and pasta but most cannot. Low acid tomatoes may be good substitutes for some people. The book *A Taste of the Good Life: A Cookbook for an Interstitial Cystitis Diet*, has a lengthy list of lower-acid tomato varieties you can grow at home!

#6: Tobacco and alcohol

Ok, we admit it, we cheated to get this one on the list... tobacco isn't really a food. But it does have some significant effects on a bladder. For one, it acts to constrict the bladder's blood vessels, interfering with the body's natural way of washing out inflammatory substances from the bladder tissues. Veteran patients prefer less pain rather than more. Is that cigarette worth a night and day of pain? Alcohol has similar effects on the bladder.

Patients' reactions to food: we're all alike, but different

Though a few people with overactive bladder or other bladder symptoms have bladders that are not sensitive to food, for the overwhelming majority of us, what we consume plays a significant role in how severe our symptoms are. While it's true that some common trigger foods, such as coffee or cranberry juice, provoke symptoms for nearly everyone, it's also true that each of us has a different tolerance level for many of the trigger foods. For instance, some patients may comfortably

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eat a small quantity of a specific food, yet if they eat more, they will have a flare. Others, to their great frustration, may not be able to tolerate even a single bite of that same trigger food without suffering increased symptoms. Still others may be able to consume all they want of that food with no trouble at all. *This variation in our response is why no one can create a list of foods to avoid that will apply uniformly to absolutely everyone with bladder symptoms.*

Patients usually spend their first six months to a year discovering the ways in which their IC food triggers are similar to others', and the ways in which their bladder reacts differently. They do this either through random trial and error, or via a systematic approach with an elimination diet. We've outlined here the most common IC triggers as well as a variety of elimination diet approaches and some IC friendly foods.

How some foods make IC symptoms worse

While it hasn't been scientifically established exactly why the foods on the diet list cause flares, urologists and researchers have proposed some credible explanations based on what we currently know about the foods and about IC.

If you recall the physiology of bladder discomfort then you understand that bladder discomfort involves mast cells in the bladder. These mast cells are not unlike the mast cells that line our sinuses and give us hay fever symptoms. Many of the foods on our list are quite high in histamine, an irritating substance that can provoke mast cells.

Another problem patients may have is increased nerve sensitivity in the bladder. Some of the items on the diet list actually stimulate and sensitize nerves, and that's not something we want to do to an already oversensitive bladder.

Dr. Lowell Parsons, a renowned researcher at the University of San Diego, has noticed that several foods on the list contain large amounts of potassium. Because some patients' bladders are known to react when potassium salts are instilled in the bladder, Dr. Parsons has suggested that for those patients, part of the problem may be the foods' potassium.

Many people have noticed that some foods on the diet list, particularly fruits and tomatoes, contain a substantial amount of acid. Food acids and their potential effect on symptoms have been the focus of much discussion over the years. While we don't have any concrete answers yet to questions of why these foods bother patients, researchers do know that certain explanations for the acid food effect are not credible.

The myths that explain the acid food effect may sound plausible but are not founded on known medical facts or unbiased scientific evidence. Typically, these myths are touted by someone trying to sell patients something.

The pseudo-scientific food myth patients run into most often on the internet is the one that claims that urine (or the body in general) is too acidic and if it was alkaline, the patient wouldn't suffer. Acid foods, it says, bother the bladder because they make the body chemistry, and thus the urine, more acid. In truth, the effect of well-known urinary alkalinizers such as PolyCitra is not universal among patients. Some patients say it makes their symptoms better, others tell their doctors it actually makes their symptoms worse. What's more, some acid foods make the urine acid while others actually turn it alkaline. Drink a lot of cranberry juice and your urine will reliably turn acid, and, if you're an overactive bladder patient, your symptoms will flare up. Do the same with orange juice and your urine will become alkaline. But even though your urine is alkaline, you'll probably have quite a flare-up! Why does one acidic food turn the urine acid and the other turn it alkaline? Because each substance is utilized by the body differently.

The IC Diet: A list of problem foods

There are a variety of lists floating around which document some of the diverse bladder irritants. Many lists are similar, yet not identical. Whether or not a particular food is listed is sometimes a matter of the beliefs, priorities, or personal experience of the author(s).

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The problem foods we've listed below are the most common ones that thousands of patients have reported trouble with. Your goal is to determine IF these foods irritate you, perhaps by using an elimination diet! If you are like most, you'll probably be able to eat a few of the foods listed as "problematic". You also might have to avoid a few others listed as "okay". Remember, this list is only a rough guide. Be prepared to be creative with your meals and in your kitchen!

Please note: About 15% of women with overactive bladder or interstitial cystitis also have vulvar pain (vulvodynia). *Some of the foods* in the "May Be Okay" column have high levels of oxalates, which women with vulvodynia react to. Those who don't have vulvodynia typically don't react to the oxalates, so they may have a much easier time getting away with foods in the "May Be Okay" column.

	USUALLY OK	MAY BE OK	USUALLY PROBLEMATIC
Beverages	chamomile tea Evian® water Gerber® pear juice milk mint tea	alfalfa tea bottled water coffee substitutes low acid decaf coffee low acid juices gin rice milk root beer w/ ice rum tap water vodka	beer carbonated water chocolate milk citrus juices cranberry juice herb teas w/ rose hips most fruit juices regular coffee sodas soy milk tea wines
Grain Products	buckwheat corn bread couscous matzo millet oat bread pasta pitas potato bread quinoa rice spelt white bread	amaranth grits oatmeal rye bread sourdough bread some graham crackers w/o problem ingredients whole wheat bread	bread or cereal w/ preservatives soy flour
Fats and Nuts	butter canola oil coconut w/o preservatives coconut oil corn oil margarine olive oil peanut oil safflower oil sesame oil shortening soy oil	almonds cashews tahini sunflower seeds	filberts hazelnuts macadamia nuts mayonnaise most salad dressings peanuts pecans pistachio nuts English and black walnuts

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Soups	homemade soups from ok meats and vegetables	Health Valley® chicken broth some canned soups w/o problem ingredients	bouillon cubes bouillon powder most packaged and canned soups
Meat, Fish and Poultry	beef chicken eggs fish lamb liver (beef or chicken) pork shellfish shrimp turkey veal	anchovies bacon Canadian bacon caviar corned beef liverwurst prosciutto some sausages w/o problem ingredients	bologna ham hot dogs most sausage pepperoni salami smoked fish
Cheeses and Other Dairy	cream cheese cottage cheese feta mozzarella ricotta string cheeses whipped cream vanilla ice cream	buttermilk canned Parmesan Cool Whip® Monterey jack some sherbets some frozen yogurt Rice Dream®	aged cheeses blue cheese brie brick parmesan camembert cheddar edam emmenthaler gruyere hard jack Roquefort sorbet soy milk soy cheese sour cream stilton swiss yogurt
Vegetables and Dried Beans	broccoli Brussel sprouts cabbage carrots cauliflower chives collard greens corn cucumber kale lentils lettuce mustard greens mushrooms most dried beans okra parsley peas	avocado beets chicory cooked bulb onions cooked leeks dandelion greens eggplant low acid tomatoes purslane raw green onions rhubarb rutabagas Swiss chard spinach turnip greens watercress	chili peppers fava beans lima beans pickles raw bulb onions sauerkraut soy beans (edamame) tomato tomato sauces tomato juice tofu

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	<p>potatoes pumpkin radishes snow peas split peas summer squash turnips winter squash yams zucchini</p>		
Fruits	<p>dates w/o preservatives coconut w/o preservatives pears</p>	<p>bananas blueberries brown raisins cherimoya citrus peels Crenshaw melon dried currants Gala apples honeydew mango (small amt) maraschino cherries rhubarb watermelon</p>	<p>apricots all citrus fruit cantaloupe cherries dried fruit w/ preservatives peaches most plums most dried figs golden raisins grapes guava kiwi fruit most berries passion fruit papaya persimmon pineapple starfruit</p>
Desserts and Sweets	<p>brown sugar carob carrot cake creme brulee custards divinity homemade pound cake homemade white & yellow cakes homemade vanilla frosting homemade caramel frosting honey licorice maple syrup pear pastries sugar sugar cookies tapioca vanilla ice cream vanilla pudding</p>	<p>banana bread blueberry pastries caramel candies peppermint ice cream plain pastries w/ almonds plain cheesecakes some frozen yogurt some hard candies w/o acids some popsicles Splenda® (sucralose) stevia white chocolate</p>	<p>acesulfame K aspartame catsup chocolate coffee ice cream desserts w/ problem nuts mustard pastries w/ problem fruits pecan pie sorbets store-bought fruitcakes mincemeat pie NutraSweet® saccharine</p>
Seasonings	<p>allspice almond extract</p>	<p>black pepper celery seed</p>	<p>ascorbic acid autolyzed yeast</p>

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**and
Additives**

anise
basil
caraway seed
coriander
dill
fennel
garlic
mace
marjoram
oregano
poppy seed
rosemary
sage
salt
thyme
tarragon
vanilla extract

cilantro
cinnamon
cumin (small amt)
dried parsley
dried chervil
ginger
lemon extract
malt powder
nutmeg
onion powder
orange extract
turmeric

BHA and BHT
benzoates
caffeine
cayenne
cloves
chili powder
citric acid
hot curry powder
hydrolyzed
protein
meat tenderizers
miso
oleoresin paprika
paprika
red pepper
soy sauce
tamari
vinegar
Worcestershire sauce
MSG (monosodium
glutamate)
metabisulfites
sulfites