

Bitesize Guide to:

Painful Bladder Syndrome (PBS)

Painful Bladder Syndrome, also called interstitial cystitis, is an overlooked and often misdiagnosed condition. PBS can have a significant impact on one's life but there are a number of treatments available to relieve its symptoms. Therefore, it is important to understand the symptoms and seek help. This is our bitesize guide to the condition.

What is it?

PBS is a bladder condition that causes long-term pain and frequent urges to urinate. Many of the symptoms of PBS overlap with symptoms of other urological conditions, such as Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs). Pain tends to travel out from the stomach to the groin, and discomfort becomes greater as the bladder fills. Women affected by painful bladder syndrome may find the pain worsen during periods.

Who gets it?

People of all ages can have PBS, but the condition tends to affect people after the age of 30. PBS is much more common in women than in men.

Why does it happen?

It is unclear what the precise cause of PBS is but possible explanations could include:

- Damage to the bladder's lining due to toxins in the urine that irritate the bladder wall, causing the bladder to become sore
- Weakened pelvic floor muscles
- Allergic reactions

Diagnosing Painful Bladder Syndrome

Many people find it difficult to discuss their urinary habits but PBS is a common condition that requires medical attention. A GP will ask about your symptoms and carry out tests to fully understand your condition.

The tests you may undergo are:

- A urine test to check for bacteria that could be the cause of a UTI
- A swab test that will check for herpes and chlamydia in women, or for men an inflammation of the prostate
- A cystoscopy to look inside your bladder

Other urological conditions have symptoms similar to those of PBS so your doctor will be required to rule out other possible conditions.

Treating Painful Bladder Syndrome

Unfortunately there is no ultimate cure for PBS. However, pain can be alleviated by managing the symptoms as effectively as possible. Your doctor will discuss your treatment options with you. The effectiveness of these treatments may vary from person to person:

Diet and lifestyle changes

- Avoiding spicy or sugary foods, dairy products and alcohol help to reduce the symptoms of PBS
- Abstaining from smoking, as the toxins in cigarettes can irritate the bladder
- Drinking less before sleep

Medication

- Over-the-counter painkillers, such as Paracetamol and Ibuprofen, to reduce any painful symptoms
- Prescription painkillers
- Antihistamines
- Bladder muscle relaxants

Surgery

- Removal of any ulcers of the bladder or the bladder itself

Other options

- Specific exercises, like Kegel exercises, can retrain and strengthen bladder muscles
- Bladder distention, in which the bladder is filled with water to relieve symptoms
- Use of a TENS machine. Pads are placed on the skin and mild electric pulses are passed through them. This can trigger the release of natural hormones that block pain and encourage blood to flow to the bladder to strengthen pelvic floor muscles

4 Key Facts about Painful Bladder Syndrome

1. Up to 75% of those affected are over 30
2. Reducing stress levels may lessen the symptoms of PBS
3. As there is no one specific cure, the management of PBS is about finding a particular combination of treatments that work best for you
4. Symptoms can last for months at a time, so it is important not to ignore them but instead ask for help

If you think you may have painful bladder syndrome, speak to your GP or a nurse.

Ref: BG02 June 2018

Planned review: Sept 2020

We want to make sure that our information is help to you and value feedback. To let us know your views or to find out the latest from The Urology Foundation visit www.theurologyfoundation.org

The Urology Foundation
1-2 St Andrew's Hill
London
EC4V 5BY

Registered charity 1128683