

Bladder Disease Affects Thousands

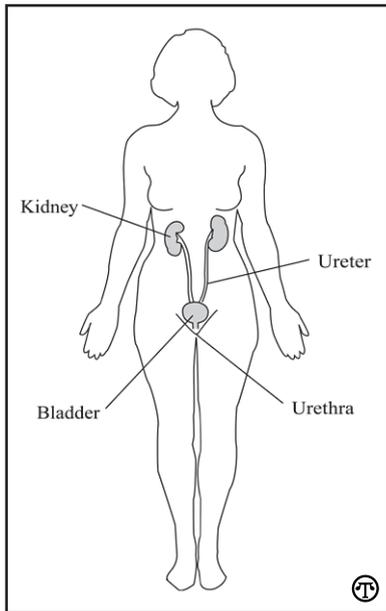
(NAPSA)—You know the pain. You have an excruciatingly full bladder and no rest-room is in sight. Now consider feeling this way every day. Imagine making dozens of bathroom trips daily or having pelvic pain so severe it interferes with your ability to work, socialize, or enjoy family.

Welcome to the world of people with interstitial cystitis (IC), a chronic, debilitating bladder disease affecting nearly 700,000 Americans, 90 percent of whom are women. The condition typically occurs around age 40, though at least 25 percent of those with IC are younger than 30.

The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases of the National Institutes of Health recently launched a national campaign to raise awareness about IC. With much of the public and many health care providers unaware of how to diagnose the condition, education about IC is vital.

“Imagine a shoe constantly crushing shards of glass inside your lower belly and you’ll have a picture of what an IC patient feels daily,” says Allison Gollin of Cherry Hill, NJ, who has IC.

IC symptoms are similar to an acute urinary tract infection (UTI): an urgent need to urinate, frequent day and night urination, and feelings of pressure, tenderness and pain around the pelvic



area. Some people with IC have pain and urinary frequency so severe it leaves them homebound. Fifty percent of sufferers are unable to work full-time because of the symptoms.

An IC diagnosis can be difficult to make. “I’m not grateful for having IC, but I’m grateful to know that I don’t have to keep going to the doctors and having them guess what I have,” says Roenna Fulton of Chicago.

In fact, getting a correct diagnosis can take years, because no current blood or urine tests can diagnose IC. The symptoms of IC

mimic other conditions, so it may be mistakenly diagnosed as a UTI or an anxiety issue. But after ruling out other problems, several specific tests are used to diagnose IC.

While IC has no cure, several methods of treatment are available. Treatments include lifestyle changes, medication, sacral nerve stimulation, and surgery. IC does not respond to antibiotics.

Scientific evidence does not link diet to IC, but restricting alcohol, high-acid foods and beverages, spices, chocolate and caffeine from the diet often relieves symptoms. Increasing fluid intake may help. Gentle stretching and bladder training techniques can also soothe pelvic pain.

“Listen to your body,” says IC patient Shelley Johnson of Washington, D.C. “Admit to yourself completely, ‘I have a serious health problem. It’s not going to kill me, but it’s going to affect every aspect of my life. I need to take care of myself, and I need to establish a lifestyle—personal and professional—that will accommodate the disease.’”

To learn more about IC, call 1-800-438-5383 or go to www.nidk.nih.gov. Other organizations provide patient support, such as the Interstitial Cystitis Association at 1-800-HELP-ICA (435-7422), www.ichelp.org.