

# IC/BPS Flare Fact Sheet [ic-network.com](http://ic-network.com)

Interstitial cystitis patients often struggle with “flares,” a sudden and dramatic worsening of their bladder symptoms. Lasting from hours to weeks, flares can be unpredictable, disruptive and difficult to manage for newly diagnosed and veteran IC patients. Bladder wall irritation is the most common type of flare, often occurring after patients eat acidic foods, are under high stress or struggling with hormone changes. Pelvic floor muscle tension can also drive flares, particularly when those muscles are provoked through riding in a car or sexual intimacy. The good news is that flares are generally short term. They do, however, require prompt intervention to reduce/avoid the trigger and minimize the duration of the flare.

## Typical Flare Triggers

**DIET** - 95% of patients report that certain foods exacerbate their IC symptoms. The most common offenders are foods high in acid, caffeine and alcohol.

**DRIVING** - 50% of IC patients report pain and discomfort while riding in a car, train, airplane or on a motorcycle. Patients are encouraged to avoid long rides until their condition has improved.

**STRESS & ANXIETY** - High periods of physical or emotional stress can exacerbate symptoms, including periods of intense cold, heat and emotional distress.

**SEX & INTIMACY** - Men with IC may experience pain at the moment of orgasm while women often feel their worst 24-48 hours after intercourse, the result of pelvic floor muscle spasms.

**EXERCISE** - Exercise that jars or puts pressure on the pelvic floor (i.e. riding a bicycle or motorcycle, spinning, running or stairs) can exacerbate pelvic pain and bladder symptoms. Exercises that keep the hips level are ideal, such as: walking, elliptical, rowing, gentle yoga and/or pilates.

**HORMONES** - Many women struggle with short term flares during ovulation and a few days before their period. Ironically, some patients flare when their progesterone levels are higher, while others flare when their estrogen levels are higher. Post-menopausal women may experience more bladder, urethral and vulvar sensitivity due to dryness of the skin. Using a compounded, preservative-free estrogen cream may help patients with estrogen atrophy.

**CHEMICAL EXPOSURE** - Chemical exposures can trigger an IC flare, including: scented candles, room fresheners, cleansers, paints, solvents and pest control products. Patients with sensitive skin report that scented laundry detergent, fabric softeners and/or dryer sheets can trigger urethral, vulvar or rectal discomfort.



**The ICN Flare Management Center offers more detailed information on flares and hour by hour rescue plans that can help reduce discomfort.**