

Patient information: Bladder pain syndrome (interstitial cystitis) (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is bladder pain syndrome? — Bladder pain syndrome is a condition that causes people to have bladder pain and urinate often ([figure 1](#)). Bladder pain syndrome is often called "BPS" for short. It is also sometimes called "painful bladder syndrome" or "interstitial cystitis."

BPS can happen in both men and women, but it is more common in women. Doctors do not know what causes BPS, but some doctors suspect it might be caused by abnormal changes in the lining of the bladder. Sometimes, BPS happens on its own. Other times, it starts after a person has:

- An infection of the urinary tract, vagina, or prostate
- Surgery on the bladder, pelvis, or back
- An injury to the pelvic area or buttocks

What are the symptoms of BPS? — All people with BPS have bladder pain that gets better after urinating. Other common symptoms include:

- Feeling the need to urinate often, during the day and night (even if you don't actually urinate)
- Urinating often, during the day and night
- Pain in the lower belly or around the area where urine leaves the body

Symptoms of BPS are different from person to person and can be mild or severe. People might not have symptoms every day. But they can have "flares," which are times when their symptoms get worse. Some people find that their symptoms get worse at certain times, such as:

- After they have certain foods or drinks
- During certain times of their monthly cycle (in women)
- After having sex or sitting for a long time
- During times of stress

Is there a test for BPS? — There is no one test to check for BPS. But your doctor or nurse will talk with you, do an exam, and probably do a urine test. Depending on the results, your doctor might do other tests, too.

For example, some people have a test called "cystoscopy." During cystoscopy, a doctor puts a thin tube with a camera on the end into the opening in the body where urine comes out (called the urethra). Then he or she advances the tube until it reaches the bladder. That way the doctor can look at the inside of the bladder to see if it is abnormal.

How is BPS treated? — There are different treatments for BPS. Most people need more than one treatment. Different treatments can include:

- Bladder training – You can train your bladder to urinate less often by holding your urine for longer periods of time. For example, if you feel the need to urinate every 30 minutes, try to wait and urinate every 45 minutes.
- Physical therapy – Many people with BPS have tight and painful muscles in the lower belly, groin, and buttocks. A physical therapist can teach you exercises to help relax these muscles.
- Medicines – Doctors can use different medicines to treat BPS. Some medicines help heal the bladder lining, and others can reduce pain. Some medicines come as pills. Others come as liquids and go into the bladder through a tube that is put up the urethra ([figure 1](#)).
- Surgery – A person might have surgery if he or she still has symptoms after trying all other treatments. During surgery, a doctor puts a small device in the lower back that connects to the nerve that goes to the bladder. The device sends electrical signals to the nerve that can stop it from feeling pain.

Can BPS flares be prevented? — To help prevent flares, you can:

- Avoid the foods and drinks that make your symptoms worse.
- Avoid activities that make your symptoms worse.
- Get treated quickly for bladder infections, which can make BPS symptoms worse.

What if I have long-term pain? — If you have long-term pain, talk with your doctor or nurse about what you can do. Some people find it helpful to work with a mental health expert or join a support group for people with BPS.

More on this topic

[Patient information: Chronic pelvic pain in women \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient information: Urinary tract infections in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient information: Diagnosis of interstitial cystitis/bladder pain syndrome \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient information: Treatment of interstitial cystitis/bladder pain syndrome \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

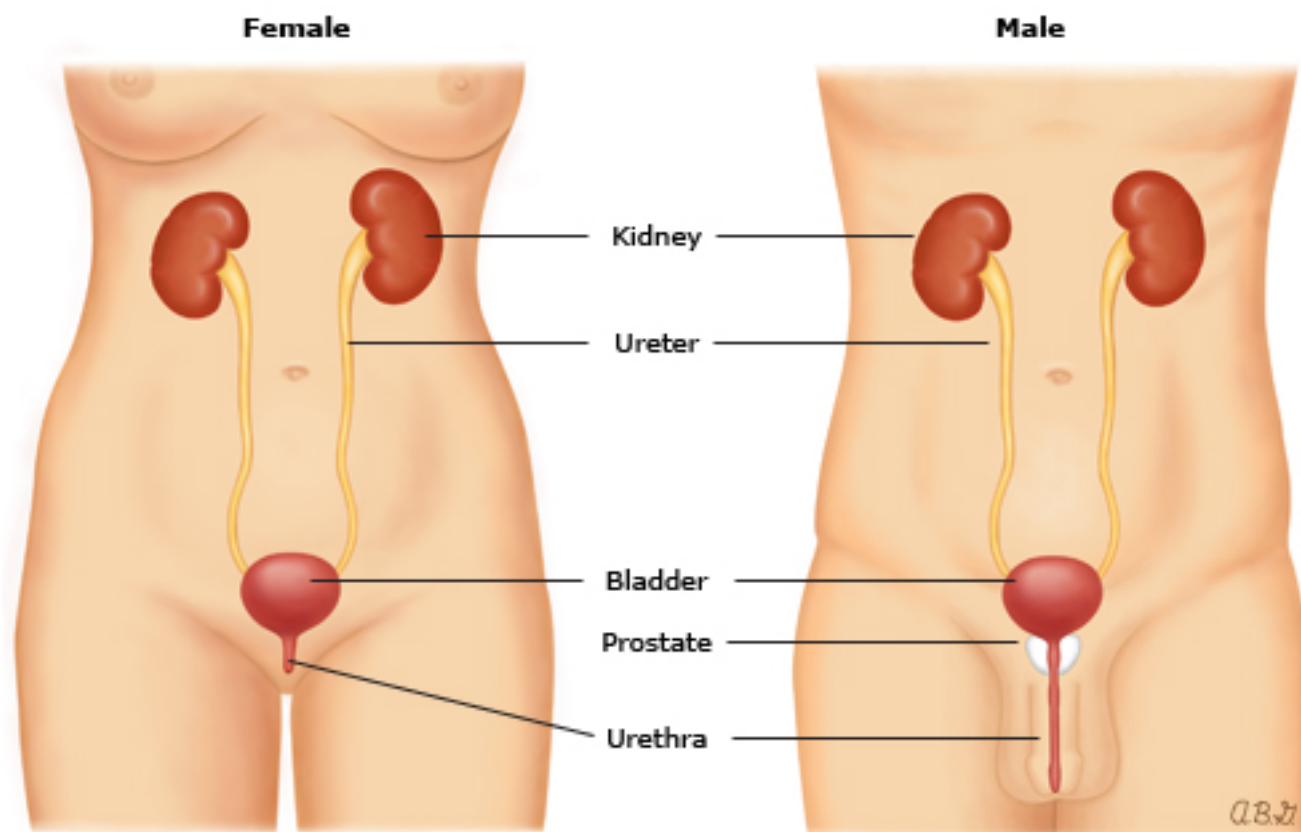
All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Aug 24, 2016.

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2016 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Topic 15918 Version 6.0

Anatomy of the urinary tract



Urine is made by the kidneys. It passes from the kidneys into the bladder through two tubes called the ureters. Then it leaves the bladder through another tube, called the urethra.

Graphic 79864 Version 6.0