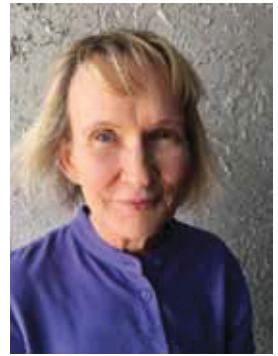


Pain-free After Interstitial Cystitis *Switching to a plant-based diet helped heal my cancer and painful interstitial cystitis.*

by Helena Broadbent



Interstitial Cystitis (IC) is a condition that causes discomfort or pain in the bladder, and a need to urinate frequently and urgently. It is far more common in women than in men, and the symptoms vary from person to person. The cause of IC isn't known, and there is no cure for it, but treatments can help some people feel better.

When I was finally diagnosed with IC at the age of 50, I realized that I had had this condition since my teenage years. I remember being 18 or 19 and getting ready to perform a musical number. At that age, I already knew that I would need to run to the bathroom just minutes before I performed. I remember being in the wings as I was being introduced, having already run to the bathroom and back, when the MC turned, held out his hand in my direction and announced my name. Suddenly I was frozen with the intense need to run back to the bathroom! It took several seconds to compose myself before I could walk out on stage. This happened many times in my young life.

Traditional Treatment

I was always treated with antibiotics for this condition. In fact, I learned to just ask for them. One doctor put me on antibiotics for an entire year, even though there was

never any evidence of infection. When my prescription was filled, I would put a pill in my hand and stare at it for

several seconds. I would think to myself, "Two days and all the pain will go away." And just like clockwork, in two days, my pain would be gone. Of course, it didn't take long for the pain to come back. I lived with this pattern of pain and medication for years before consulting with a urologist.

As I was telling my new doctor about my unrelenting and unbearable

pain, he held up his hand and said, "Stop. I know what you have." He admitted me to the hospital to take a sample of

the inside of my bladder to confirm his diagnosis. He said I had the worst bladder he had ever seen in his life. He told me that the inside of my bladder looked like a waffle (meaning the lining was filled with pockets of pus!). I was treated with DMSO, a solvent that is FDA-approved to treat IC. It was extremely painful when the solu-

tion was injected into my bladder, but it did take some of the pain away, and it helped my bladder to operate normally for the first time in many years.

I was treated for almost a year with DMSO, as well as a new drug (called Elmiron) that was also on the market. Nothing worked long-term. I was usually in agonizing pain within a few days after treatment. The drugs brought my pain level down to a seven for a few days, and then it



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would shoot back up to eight or nine. After about a year of treatment with a urologist, I was finally sent to a pain doctor.

The pain doctor asked what kind of pain pills I had been taking. I hung my head and confessed I had taken just about everything that was on the market. My family doctor prescribed Demerol but was reluctant to keep giving it to me. Nothing worked. There is no pain medicine out there that takes pain away without totally knocking you out.

I was prescribed methadone, Percocet, and OxyContin—all at the same time. I spent the next 10 years in bed. I was up every two hours running to the bathroom, running back to bed, and contemplating all the different ways I could kill myself. Fortunately, I didn't have the self-confidence that I could do it without hurting the people I love or leaving a mess for someone to clean up. I did finally experience a level 10 pain when I was out of town. The pain was so intense that I laid on the couch for three days not eating anything, and transported myself up to the ceiling where I could look down on my pathetic body in unbearable pain.

New Treatment

As a rather unusual twist of fate, I was diagnosed with stage-1 breast cancer in the same year I was diagnosed with IC (2001). I went through all the prescribed treatment, but the cancer came back 11 years later as stage-4 breast cancer. I was fortunate to have a wonderful oncology nurse who told me to watch the DVD *Forks Over Knives*.

Upon watching this documentary, I immediately switched my diet in order to cure my cancer, even though it was difficult to get up out of bed and cook meals. Ten years in bed makes your muscles atrophy and your bones deteriorate. I made the decision to begin tapering off all my medications in order to feel awake. It took 10 months and a lot of shaking to get off the pills. At the same time, I tried some marijuana (in candied form) to see if it would curb the pain; and to my surprise, it worked great, and I was finally able to sleep at night.

After living on a whole-food, plant-based diet for about a year, I noticed my bladder pain was not as bad. I was highly motivated to keep up with my new diet because of the cancer


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diagnosis, but as it turned out, my bladder pain, over the course of about three years, nearly disappeared! I still had occasional pains and would have to run to the hospital for a shot of Demerol, where I was treated like a criminal since I had been there so many times before. But they would finally give me a shot and I would sleep for two days.

I also realized that I suffered from anxiety. I bought some books, which helped a lot. I look back on my life and realize that the stress of performing always set my bladder pain off. Demands of college were stressful, motherhood was stressful, and working full-time with three young children was stressful. I found a book called the *The Pain Antidote*. I didn't agree with all of it, but it did talk about how pain originates in the brain and can travel down the spinal chord to any area of the body. The author's treatment was

counseling and switching to a good diet. I learned to “talk to my brain,” telling it that the reason for my pain was gone. I kept meditating and telling my inner self that there was no longer a reason for pain. The exercise was similar to staring at my antibiotics and telling myself that in two days I would feel no pain. After several months I noticed my pain was gone, and it has never returned.

I still have frequency and urgency issues, but they are not nearly as bad. I am now taking music lessons again and have conquered a lot of my performance fears. I also play in two bell choirs and am enjoying life to the fullest. I would tell any person suffering from this disease to switch to a whole-food, plant-based diet, walk for exercise, and do something every day that you enjoy.

I discovered the NHA during a trip to TrueNorth Health. My husband and I decided a trip to TrueNorth would really kickstart our commitment to good health. After all, I had a stage-4 cancer diagnosis (which remains a challenge for me still, but I do feel better than I ever have), and he had some weight to lose. I was sitting in the front office one day, waiting to make an appointment with one of the doctors, and I noticed a magazine sitting on the table next to me. The magazine turned out to be *Health Science!* I sat there and read it all the way through. I made a mental note of where to subscribe and have been getting it ever since! 

“Here I am in 2017 modeling my tie-dyed gloves (to protect the bells) at the Handbell Musicians of America Conference in Anaheim, CA.”

