



Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a chronic condition that affects the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. The most common symptoms are abdominal pain and a change in bowel habits without any detectable cause your doctor can find.

You may find that certain things trigger your symptoms. Common triggers are specific foods, stress, hormones, a women's menstrual cycle, and infectious diarrhea (gastroenteritis). Why this happens or what causes IBS are still unknown, despite thorough research into the condition.

It is estimated to affect between 10% and 20% of people but only about 15% of people seek medical help for their symptoms. IBS can affect anyone at any age but tends to start before the age of 35.

What are the Symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

The most common symptom of IBS is abdominal pain that tends to occur with a change in bowel habits. Most people describe the abdominal pain as a crampy pain that varies in intensity. Eating often makes the pain worse, while having a bowel movement tends to improve the pain. It is also common to have either diarrhea, constipation, or a combination of both during these episodes. You may also experience bloating, gas, or belching.

How is Irritable Bowel Syndrome Diagnosed?

Since there is no known cause of IBS, the diagnosis of this condition is made by excluding other possible causes of your symptoms. Your doctor will likely take a medical history from you and perform an examination. Based upon what they find, they may order blood tests or more invasive tests, such as a colonoscopy. These tests are all likely to be normal.

How is Irritable Bowel Syndrome Treated?

Since most people experience different IBS symptoms, your treatment will need to be designed to treat your specific symptoms. This will require you to work closely with your doctor over a long period of time to find the right combination of treatments for you.



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Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Your treatment is likely to start with a symptom diary, so that you can identify things that make your symptoms worse. Based on your symptom diary, your doctor may recommend that you remove specific foods from your diet to see if this improves your symptoms. Common foods that may be eliminated are dairy products, beans (legumes), and cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cabbage, etc.). If you experience constipation, you will likely be encouraged to increase your daily fiber intake.

Stress and anxiety have been found to worsen the symptoms of IBS. Because of this, your doctor may recommend methods to reduce your stress and anxiety levels including formal counseling, support groups, or cognitive behavioral therapy. Daily exercise may also help.

There are a number of different medications that can be tried to treat your symptoms, but none of them will cure your IBS. The choice of medication will depend upon your symptoms. Some common medications that you may be prescribed are an antidepressant, linaclotide, lubiprostone, alosetron, dicyclomine, and hyoscyamine.

What is the Prognosis of Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

IBS is a chronic condition that comes and goes, causing symptoms that range from mild to severe. While it can cause significant discomfort, it is not associated with any serious long-term health problems. Over time, you are likely to find ways to control your symptoms so that your IBS has less of an impact on your daily life. But if you find your symptoms suddenly change, you should talk with your doctor.

Where Can You Get More Information About Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

- **International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders**
<https://www.iffgd.org/>
- **American College of Gastroenterology**
<http://patients.gi.org/topics/irritable-bowel-syndrome/>
- **U.S National Library of Medicine**
<https://medlineplus.gov/irritablebowelsyndrome.html>

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