



Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What is irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a "syndrome," meaning a group of symptoms. The most common symptoms of IBS are abdominal pain or discomfort often reported as cramping, bloating, gas, diarrhea, and/or constipation. IBS affects the colon, or large bowel, which is the part of the digestive tract that stores stool.

IBS is not a disease. It's a functional disorder, meaning that the bowel doesn't work, or function, correctly.

What causes IBS?

Doctors are not sure what causes IBS. The nerves and muscles in the bowel appear to be extra sensitive in people with IBS. Muscles may contract too much when you eat. These contractions can cause cramping and diarrhea during or shortly after a meal. Or the nerves may react when the bowel stretches, causing cramping or pain.

IBS can be painful. But it does not damage the colon or other parts of the digestive system. IBS does not lead to other health problems.

What are the symptoms of IBS?

The main symptoms of IBS are

- abdominal pain or discomfort in the abdomen, often relieved by or associated with a bowel movement
- chronic diarrhea, constipation, or a combination of both

Other symptoms are

- whitish mucus in the stool
- a swollen or bloated abdomen
- **the feeling that you have not finished a bowel movement**

How is IBS diagnosed?

The doctor may suspect that you have IBS because of your symptoms. Medical tests may also be done to make sure you don't have any other health problems that cause the same symptoms.

Medical Tests for IBS

In addition to a physical exam and blood tests, the following tests might be done to diagnose IBS: Colonoscopy. For this test the doctor inserts a long, thin tube, called a colonoscope, into your anus and up into your colon. The tube has a light and tiny lens on the end. The doctor can view the inside of your colon on a big television screen.

How is IBS treated?

IBS has no cure, but you can do things to relieve symptoms. Treatment may involve

- diet changes
- medicine
- stress relief

You may have to try a few things to see what works best for you. Your doctor can help you find the right treatment plan.

Diet Changes

Some foods and drinks make IBS worse.

Foods and drinks that may cause or worsen symptoms include

- fatty foods, like french fries
- milk products, like cheese or ice cream
- chocolate
- alcohol
- caffeinated drinks, like coffee and some sodas



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- carbonated drinks, like soda

To find out which foods are a problem, keep a diary that tracks

- what you eat during the day
- what symptoms you have
- when symptoms occur
- what foods always make you feel sick

Some foods make IBS better.

Fiber may reduce the constipation associated with IBS because it makes stool soft and easier to pass. However, some people with IBS who have more sensitive nerves may feel a bit more abdominal discomfort after adding more fiber to their diet. Fiber is found in foods such as breads, cereals, beans, fruits, and vegetables.

Examples of foods with fiber include

Fruits	Vegetables	Breads, cereals, and beans
apples peaches	broccoli (raw) cabbage carrots (raw) peas	kidney beans lima beans whole-grain bread whole-grain cereal

Add foods with fiber to your diet a little at a time to let your body get used to them. Too much fiber at once can cause gas, which can trigger symptoms in a person with IBS.

Your doctor may ask you to add more fiber to your diet by taking a fiber pill or drinking water mixed with a special high-fiber powder.

Eat small meals.

Large meals can cause cramping and diarrhea in people with IBS. If this happens to you, try eating four or five small meals a day instead of less-frequent big meals.

Medicine

The doctor may give you medicine to help with symptoms.

- Laxatives treat constipation. Many kinds of laxatives are available. Your doctor can help you find the laxative that is right for you.
- Antispasmodics control spasms in the colon and help ease abdominal pain.

Antidepressants, even in lower doses than are used for treating depression, can help people with IBS. They can help reduce the abdominal discomfort or pain associated with IBS and, depending on the type chosen, may help the diarrhea or constipation.

Does stress cause IBS?

Emotional stress does not cause IBS. But people with IBS may have their bowels react more to stress. So, if you already have IBS, stress can make your symptoms worse.



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Stress Relief

Learning to reduce stress can help with IBS. With less stress, you may find you have less cramping and pain. You may also find it easier to manage your symptoms.

Meditation, exercise, hypnosis, and counseling may help. You may need to try different activities to see what works best for you.

For More Information:

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