

## IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

### What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is not a disease but an ongoing disorder with pain or discomfort in your abdomen and changes in bowel movement patterns. Unlike inflammatory bowel diseases, this condition does not cause permanent damage to the large intestine or increase your risk of colon cancer. IBS is more common in women under age 45.



### What causes IBS?

The exact cause of IBS is unknown. It is believed to be caused by a combination of problems:

#### Physical:

- Problem with signals between the brain and intestines
- Problem moving food through the digestive system
- Infection in the stomach or intestines
- Bacterial overgrowth in the small intestines
- Changes in hormone levels or other body chemicals that send nerve signals
- Increased sensitivity to pain

**Mental:** Stress, depression, anxiety, panic disorders, etc.

**Genetics:** Family history of IBS

**Food:** Undiagnosed food sensitivities or allergies

### What are the symptoms of IBS?

The symptoms can be different from person to person. Symptoms usually occur soon after eating a meal.

- Cramping and abdominal pain (maybe relieved after having a bowel movement)
- Bloating and gas
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Strong urge to have a bowel movement
- Mucus in the stool

It is recommended that you keep a record of your symptoms so you can discuss them with your doctor. If you experience more serious symptoms such as weight loss, rectal bleeding or progressive abdominal pain, see your doctor right away.

### How is IBS diagnosed?

Depending on your symptoms, your doctor may ask you about your medical and family history, perform a physical exam, and run some tests to find out the causes for your symptoms.

These tests include:

- **Flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy:** a procedure that uses a flexible, narrow, lighted tube with a tiny camera at the end to look inside the rectum, lower colon or entire colon.
- **Lower GI series:** an X-ray examination of the large intestine by filling the colon with liquid barium.

- **Blood tests:** To check for anemia or other diseases such as celiac disease.
- **Stool tests:** To check for certain bacteria or parasites in the digestive system.

### Complications of IBS

- Hemorrhoids - due to frequent diarrhea and constipation
- Malnutrition - due to long term elimination of many foods

### Treatment of IBS

There is no cure for IBS. However, there are ways to manage the symptoms:

- Eat a varied diet and drink plenty of water.
- Eat 5 or 6 small meals each day.
- Include more fiber in your diet (increase fiber intake gradually to prevent excessive bloating and gas)
  - ❖ Soluble fiber helps both diarrhea and constipation. It absorbs water and makes the stool softer and easier to pass. Examples of foods high in soluble fiber include oat bran, apples, barley, beans, and citrus fruits. Psyllium, a natural vegetable fiber supplement, contains mostly soluble fiber.

- ❖ Insoluble fiber relieves constipation by adding bulk to your stool and moving them more quickly through your digestive system. Insoluble fiber is found in whole grain breads, nuts, seeds, wheat bran, and many vegetables and fruits.

- Avoid foods that make your symptoms worse, such as fatty foods, alcohol, coffee, cabbage, beans, dairy products, etc.
- Manage stress: Symptoms may worsen with stress. Try to exercise regularly, get enough sleep, practice relaxation or meditation, talk to your family, friends or a counselor about things that stress you out.
- Medication: Depending on your symptoms, your doctor may prescribe medicine such as tranquilizer or sedative, antidepressant, antibiotic, probiotic or fiber supplement, anti-diarrheal or other medicines to relieve symptoms.

### For more information on IBS:

<https://familydoctor.org/condition/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/>

<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/irritable-bowel-syndrome>