

What is IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome)?

IBS is also known as spastic colon, irritable colon, mucous colitis, and spastic colitis. It is a separate condition from inflammatory bowel disease and isn't related to other bowel conditions. IBS is a group of intestinal symptoms that typically occur together. The symptoms vary in severity and duration from person to person. However, they last at least three months for at least three days per month.

IBS can cause intestinal damage in some cases. However, that is not common.

IBS doesn't increase your risk of gastrointestinal cancers, but it can still have a significant effect on your life.

IBS symptoms

The symptoms of IBS typically include:

- cramping
- abdominal pain
- bloating and gas
- constipation
- diarrhea

It's not uncommon for people with IBS to have episodes of both constipation and diarrhea. Symptoms such as bloating, and gas typically go away after you have a bowel movement. Symptoms of IBS aren't always persistent. They can resolve, only to come back. However, some people do have continuous symptoms.

Symptoms of IBS in women

Women may tend to have symptoms around the time of menstruation, or they may have more symptoms during this time. Menopausal women have fewer symptoms than women who are still menstruating. Some women have also reported that certain symptoms increase during pregnancy.

Symptoms of IBS in men

Symptoms of IBS in men are the same as the symptoms in women. However, a lot fewer men report their symptoms and seek treatment.

IBS pain

IBS pain may feel like cramping. With this cramping, you will also have at least two of the following experiences:

- some relief of pain after a bowel movement
- a change in how often you have a bowel movement
- changes in the way your stools look

IBS diagnosis

Your doctor may be able to diagnose IBS based on your symptoms. They may also take one or more of the following steps to rule out other possible causes of your symptoms:

- have you adopted a certain diet or cut out specific food groups for a period to rule out any food allergies?
- have a stool sample examined to rule out infection
- have blood tests done to check for anemia and rule out celiac disease
- perform a colonoscopy
- A colonoscopy is typically only done if your doctor suspects that your symptoms are being caused by colitis, inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease), or cancer.

IBS diet

For some people, dietary changes can go a long way in helping ease symptoms. Because the symptoms of IBS vary among people with the condition, approaches to dietary changes need to vary.

Treating IBS

There is no cure for IBS. Treatment is aimed at symptom relief. Initially, your doctor may have you make certain lifestyle changes. These "home remedies" are typically suggested before the use of medication.

Home remedies for IBS

Certain home remedies or lifestyle changes may help to relieve your IBS symptoms without the use of medication. Examples of these lifestyle changes include:

- participating in regular physical exercise
- cutting back on caffeinated beverages that stimulate the intestines
- eating smaller meals
- minimizing stress (talk therapy may help)
- taking probiotics ("good" bacteria normally found in the intestines) to help relieve gas and bloating
- avoiding deep-fried or spicy foods

Foods to avoid with IBS

Managing your diet when you have IBS may take a little extra time but is often worth the effort. Modifying amounts or eliminating certain foods such as dairy, fried foods, indigestible sugars, and beans may help to reduce different symptoms. For some people, adding spices and herbs such as ginger, peppermint, and chamomile has helped to reduce some IBS symptoms.

IBS medication

If your symptoms do not improve through home remedies, such as lifestyle or dietary changes, your doctor may suggest the use of medications. Different people can respond differently to the same medication, so you may need to work with your doctor to find the right medication for you.

As with all medication, when considering new medication, it's important to tell your doctor what you are already taking, including herbal remedies and over-the-counter medications. This will help your doctor avoid any medication that could interact with what you are already taking.

Some drugs are used to treat all symptoms of IBS, while other drugs are focused on specific symptoms. Drugs that are used include medications to control muscle spasms, anti-constipation drugs, tricyclic antidepressants to ease pain, and antibiotics. If your main IBS symptom is constipation, linaclotide and lubiprostone are two drugs that are recommended by the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG).

What causes IBS?

Although there are many ways to treat IBS, the exact cause of IBS is unknown. Possible causes include an overly sensitive colon or immune system. Postinfectious IBS is caused by a previous bacterial infection in the gastrointestinal tract. The varied possible causes make IBS difficult to prevent.

The physical processes involved in IBS can also vary, but may consist of:

- slowed or spastic movements of the colon, causing painful cramping
- abnormal serotonin levels in the colon, affecting motility and bowel movements
- mild celiac disease that damages the intestines, causing IBS symptoms

IBS triggers

For many people, the key to managing IBS symptoms is to avoid triggers. Certain foods as well as stress and anxiety can be triggers for IBS symptoms for many people.

Certain foods are common triggers for many people with IBS. However, some of these foods may have a greater effect on you than others. It may help to keep a food diary for a period to learn which foods are triggers for you.

Recognizing in advance situations that may increase your levels of stress and anxiety can help.

This can give you time to either plan to avoid these situations when possible or develop strategies to limit the stress and anxiety.

IBS with stress

The automatic movement, or motility, of your digestive system is controlled to a great degree by your nervous system. Stress can affect your nerves, making your digestive system overactive. If you have IBS, your colon may be overly responsive to even slight disruption of your digestive system. It is also believed that IBS is affected by the immune system, which is affected by stress.

IBS with weight loss

IBS doesn't affect the weight of everyone with the condition. However, it can potentially lead to weight loss if you don't eat enough to maintain your weight to avoid symptoms. Cramping may come more often right after you eat. If frequent diarrhea is one of your symptoms, your body

may not be getting all of the nutrients from the food you eat. Your weight may decrease as a result of this.

IBS with diarrhea

IBS with diarrhea is a specific type of IBS. It primarily affects your large intestine. Common symptoms of IBS with diarrhea include frequent stools and nausea. Some people with IBS with diarrhea occasionally lose bowel control.

IBS with constipation

IBS with constipation is a type of IBS that typically affects adolescents and young adults. Stools that are hard and happen less often as well as constipation are the most common symptoms of this type of IBS.