

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is one of the most common gastrointestinal conditions (as many as one in five American adults has IBS). Symptoms of IBS include:

- Abdominal bloating
- Pain or cramping
- Gas
- Diarrhea
- Mucus in the stool
- Constipation
- ALL of the above

Some people are embarrassed by their symptoms and find it hard to talk about their condition, even with their doctor. However, in many cases, you can control your symptoms by managing your diet, lifestyle and stress.

Unfortunately, in most instances, IBS is a chronic condition. There are times when the signs and symptoms are worse and times when they improve or even disappear completely. Most people with IBS find signs and symptoms improve as they learn to control the condition.

Causes of IBS

The exact cause of IBS is unknown. People with diarrhea and pain in the muscles of the wall of the intestines may have a hyperactive colon. In people with constipation, the opposite occurs.

Women are twice as likely to have IBS as men and hormones may play a role in the symptoms.

Triggers of IBS

Triggers of IBS may worsen diarrhea, bloating, and pain. These triggers include:

- Stress
- Gastrointestinal infections (gastroenteritis)
- Certain foods, such as chocolate, milk, alcohol, fatty foods, and carbonated beverages

Reduce your symptoms by:

- Eating regularly
- Experimenting with fiber
- Avoiding problem foods
- Testing if you are lactose intolerant
- Drinking 60 ounces of water per day
- Exercising regularly

When to ask for help from your gastroenterologist

Seek medical advice if your lifestyle is severely affected by your symptoms or if you experience:

- blood in your stool
- excessive pain
- a persistent change in your bowel habits

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