

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME – IBS (Also known as spastic colon or nervous stomach)

What is IBS?

Irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS, is a problem that affects mainly the large intestine. The bowel is the part of the digestive system that makes and stores stool. The word syndrome means a group of symptoms. IBS is a syndrome because it can cause several symptoms. For example, IBS causes cramping, bloating, gas, diarrhea, and/or constipation.

IBS is not a disease. It's a functional disorder, which means that the bowel doesn't work as it should.

With IBS, the nerves and muscles in the bowel are extra sensitive. For example, the muscles may contract too much when you eat. These contractions can cause cramping and diarrhea during or shortly after a meal. Or the nerves can be overly sensitive to the stretching of the bowel (because of gas, for example). Cramping or pain can result.

IBS can be painful. But it does not damage the bowel or cause any other diseases.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms of IBS are:

- Crampy pain in the abdomen
- Painful diarrhea or constipation

Most people with IBS have either diarrhea or constipation, but some people have both.

Other symptoms are:

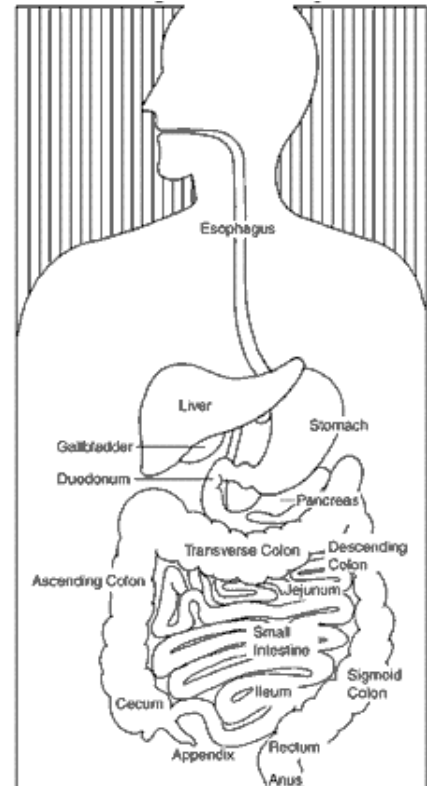
- Mucus in the stool
- Swollen or bloated abdomen
- The feeling that you have not finished a bowel movement

How is IBS diagnosed?

The clinician will diagnose IBS based on your symptoms. You might have some medical tests to rule out other diseases.

Does stress cause IBS?

Emotional stress will not cause a person to develop IBS. But if you already have IBS, stress can trigger symptoms. In fact, the bowel can overreact to all sorts of things, including food, exercise, and hormones.



Check our website: www.uhs.berkeley.edu to learn more about this medical concern or others.

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IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME – IBS (Continued)

What to do for IBS

IBS cannot be cured; symptoms will come and go. However, the symptoms and discomfort can be controlled.

- Add fiber to your diet to help your intestines function normally. Fiber increases intestinal motility to reduce constipation by creating a bulkier bowel movement, and fiber decreases intestinal motility in diarrhea by absorbing excess water from the stool. Dietary fiber includes complex carbohydrates, grains, fruits, vegetables, and beans, whole grain breads and cereals. Supplements such as Metamucil® or Citrucel® are natural fiber and maybe a helpful addition for fiber. When adding fiber to your diet, *do it slowly* to allow your intestines to adjust.
- Avoid fatty, greasy foods in order to decrease the cholecystokinin production. Cholecystokinin is a hormone that is a potent stimulus for propulsive contractions of the colon. It aggravates the colon.
- Avoid gastric irritants such as caffeine, alcohol and nicotine.
- People with IBS do not produce more gas than people without IBS, but they often experience more cramping. Monitor your own response to specific foods and adjust accordingly. Some people with IBS cannot tolerate certain foods such broccoli, cauliflower, onions, beans and cabbage.
- 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. Or, have your usual three meals, but eat less at each meal.
- Avoid swallowing excessive amounts of air by chewing and eating slowly in a relaxed environment.
- Avoid chewing gum, mints, and tobacco products which increase air swallowing.
- Keep a food diary in order to find out which foods are easier for you to digest.
- Wear loose comfortable clothing.
- Do regular exercise to strengthen abdominal muscles; stronger abdominal muscles are better able to handle gas problems.
- Reduce stress. Stress is any stimulation that requires adaption or change. It affects people in different ways. Recognize the cause; learn what triggers your stress; learn different coping skills (exercise, share concerns, biofeedback, meditation, counseling).

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