
Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a pattern of symptoms that indicate an abnormal condition in the digestive tract.

What are the Symptoms of IBS

Common IBS Symptoms include:

- Stomach pain
- Cramping or discomfort
- Gas
- Bloating,
- Painful constipation and/or diarrhea
- Alternating constipation and diarrhea.

What Causes IBS Symptoms?

Feces or stool are moved by muscles in your colon. Some nerve impulses speed up contractions whereas others slow them down. When these contractions are well balanced, normal bowel movements occur.

People with IBS have a colon that is more sensitive and reacts more easily to a variety of triggers that would not affect others as much. When your colon moves slowly or stops, more water than usual is absorbed, resulting in constipation. When your colon moves fast, not as much water is absorbed, resulting in diarrhea. Bloating, pain, and cramping can occur with a colon spasm and/or excessive gas.

What are some Triggers for IBS Symptoms?

Some common triggers include the following:

- **Diet:** High fat foods, high calorie or large meals, milk products, alcohol, caffeine, and carbonated drinks can significantly increase colon contractions, producing

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cramps and diarrhea.

- **Emotions:** Stress can produce colon spasms. Many people with IBS are sometimes anxious and tense; have emotional ups and downs; may eat quickly; have hurried, unplanned meals; do not get enough sleep. These things may also worsen IBS symptoms.

What is Treatment Like for IBS?

Once you know what things contributing to your symptoms, you can work with your health care team to design a plan for your unique situation. This plan may include the following:

- **Diet:** Your medical provider may suggest you modify what you eat in the following ways: (a) Avoid or reduce high fat foods and large quantities of food, (b) decrease fried foods, milk, and milk products, (c) avoid or decrease caffeinated drinks and alcohol, and (d) slowly increase foods containing fiber.
- **Medication:** If appropriate, your medical provider may prescribe medications for you. These may include the following:
 - Antispasmodics (e.g., dicyclomine) to help normalize colon contractions by regulating the chemicals that produce rhythm-controlling impulses.
 - Tranquilizers (e.g., lorazepam) to help calm you a little so unusual stresses are less likely to trigger an attack or make symptoms worse.
 - Serotonin-4 receptor 5HT4 agonists to activate 5HT4 receptors in your colon, normalizing impaired motility by stimulating colon secretion and inhibiting sensitivity.
- **Behavioral Changes:** Because stress, changing emotions, anxiety, worry, and depressed mood can contribute to initiating symptoms or making them worse, learning strategies to manage emotional distress through relaxation and/or questioning and/or changing unhelpful thoughts can be helpful to decrease the frequency and intensity of your IBS symptoms. In addition, changing behaviors, such as increasing physical activity, getting quality sleep, eating meals at the same time each day at paced intervals, and minimizing or eliminating alcohol, caffeine, and/or tobacco, can have a positive effect.

Reference

Hunter, C. L, Goodie, J. L., Oordt, M. S., & Dobmeyer, A. C. (2009). *Integrated behavioral health in primary care: Step-by-step guidance for assessment and intervention*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

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Other Resources

Many books are available that discuss dietary changes for IBS. Some examples include the following:

Peikin, S. R. (2004). *Gastrointestinal health: The proven nutritional program to prevent, cure, or alleviate irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), ulcers, gas, constipation, heartburn, and many other digestive disorders* (3rd ed.). New York: HarperCollins.

Magee, E. (2000). *Tell me what to eat if I have irritable bowel syndrome: Nutrition you can live with*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press.

Van Vorous, H. (2000). *Eating for IBS: 175 delicious, nutritious, low-fat, low-residue recipes to stabilize the touchiest tummy*. New York: Marlowe.