

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable Bowel Syndrome or IBS is a chronic condition that produces abdominal pain and abnormal bowel movements. However, it is very important to note that there is no problem with the structure of the intestine.

What causes Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Many things are thought to trigger IBS and often the triggers are different for each person. In some instances, it occurs after an intestinal infection. IBS symptoms may become worse after eating certain foods or when someone is experiencing increased stress or anxiety. There may be a problem with muscle movement in the intestine or a lower tolerance for stretching and movement of the intestine.

What are the symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

IBS can produce many different symptoms such as:

- Abdominal distention
- Abdominal fullness, gas, bloating
- Abdominal pain that:
 - Comes and goes
 - Is reduced or goes away after a bowel movement
 - Occurs after meals
- Chronic and frequent constipation, usually accompanied by pain
- Chronic and frequent diarrhea, usually accompanied by pain
- Emotional distress
- Depression
- Loss of appetite

How is Irritable Bowel Syndrome diagnosed?

IBS is not diagnosed with a specific test because it does not involve a problem with the physical structure of the digestive tract.

IBS is diagnosed by a thorough medical history and physical exam. Many times, tests may be ordered by your doctor to look for other conditions that could be causing symptoms before making a clinical diagnosis of IBS.

How is Irritable Bowel Syndrome treated?

Since IBS is a chronic condition, treatment is focused on managing the symptoms.

Lifestyle changes can be helpful in some cases of IBS. For example, regular exercise and improved sleep habits may reduce anxiety and help relieve bowel symptoms.

Dietary changes can be helpful. However, no specific diet can be recommended for IBS in general, because the condition differs from one person to another. Increasing dietary fiber and avoiding foods and drinks that stimulate the intestines (such as caffeine) may help. Patients with diarrhea may benefit from a diet very low in carbohydrates.

Other possible treatments may include:

- Counseling in cases of severe anxiety or depression
- Antidiarrheal medications for those whose main symptom is diarrhea
- Medications to stimulate bowel movements for those with constipation
- Low-dose medications to help calm the nerves that cause intestinal pain
- Probiotics (good bacteria)

Many natural and herbal remedies have been advertised for the treatment of IBS. These treatments have NOT been proven to be effective.

Important tips on Irritable Bowel Syndrome

- Although IBS can produce substantial physical discomfort and emotional distress, people with IBS do not usually develop serious long-term health conditions.
- The majority of people with IBS learn to control their symptoms.
- Because of the chronic nature of IBS, working closely with your physician can help bring success in managing symptoms.
- Treatment is very individualized and might require trying a few different treatments before finding what works for you.
- Call us if your symptoms change, become worse, or you are experiencing new gastrointestinal problems.

