

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What Is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)?

IBS is a chronic disorder characterized by abnormally increased motility of the small and large intestines, producing abdominal pain, constipation & or diarrhea. It's also called *irritable colon*, or *spastic colon*.

It's considered as a functional bowel disorder, unlike ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease, IBS neither cause inflammation or changes in bowel tissue nor increase the risk of colorectal cancer. In many cases, it can be controlled mainly by managing patient diet, lifestyle and stress.

Who gets IBS, & what causes it??

Many people have occasional signs and symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, but young females are most likely to have it. Overall, about twice as many women have the condition. IBS symptoms usually begin before the age of 35 for 50 % of people. Genetics or heredity also may play a role.

So the main Risk factors for IBS is being young & being female!!!

No one knows exactly what causes irritable bowel syndrome. Normally, the GIT muscles contract and relax in a coordinated rhythm. But with IBS the contractions may be stronger and last longer than normal. It may become faster causing diarrhea or in some cases slower causing constipation.

Possible causes include:

- 1- Changes in the nerves that control sensation or muscle contractions in the bowel. People with IBS may have a heightened sensitivity to stretching of the bowel with gas, leading to pain or bloating.
- 2- Changes in the central nervous system, which may affect the colon.
- 3- The immune system may respond differently to stress & infection in people with IBS.
- 4- Science women are twice as likely to have IBS; it's believed that hormonal changes also play a role.

What are the main symptoms of IBS?

Basically, IBS is a collection of symptoms that a patient have had for a long while, for at least 12 weeks in the previous 12 months. IBS always involves abdominal pain or discomfort.

This pain must have two of these three characteristics to be diagnosed as IBS:

- Relieved with defecation,
- Associated with a change in frequency of stool,
- Associated with a change in form (appearance) of stool.

The exact symptoms & their severity differ from one patient to another & even from time to time for the same patient...plus most of the time symptoms may resemble those of other diseases.

Among the most common symptoms are:

- Abdominal pain or cramping,
- A bloated feeling & Gas (flatulence),
- Diarrhea or constipation – sometimes alternating bouts of constipation and diarrhea, & a constant change in the frequency or consistency of the stool.
- Mucus in the stool.
- Straining, urgency or a feeling that he can't empty your bowels completely.

For most people, IBS is a chronic condition that always needs management, although there will likely be times when the signs and symptoms are worse, in other times they may improve or even disappear completely.

Does IBS have any complications?

- Diarrhea and constipation, both signs of irritable bowel syndrome, can aggravate hemorrhoids.
 - IBS flares can interfere with patients work, social relationships, and their ability to live their life to the fullest.
 - Patient may feel discouraged or depressed.
 - avoiding certain foods the triggers symptoms, may also cause malnutrition.

What factors may trigger the symptoms (acute flares) of IBS?

There is no single factor to trigger IBS symptoms.

For some people, certain foods may trigger the symptoms, stress, & certain medications may also stimulate it.

Note that Emotional stress does not cause IBS. But people with IBS may have their bowels react more to stress. So, patients who already have IBS, stress can make their symptoms worse.

Is there a cure for IBS?

Unfortunately, no cure has been found for IBS, but many options are available to treat the symptoms. The doctor will give the best treatment options for the patient particular symptoms along with encouraging stress management & making diet changes.

How to deal with IBS acute symptoms & how can patient avoid it?

- If stress triggers the symptoms, some form of psychological therapy such as playing sports, doing activities they enjoy, meditation or stress management may help dealing more positively with stress and help prevent or reduce stress-related IBS episodes.
- Medications may be used along with lifestyle changes to manage symptoms of IBS, but they should be used under physician supervision, since for example, anti-diarrheal medications may cause constipation.... each case should be closely evaluated.

Medications for IBS may include:

- Anticholinergics for cramping, such as loperamide (Imodium) for diarrhea, Otilonio (spasmomen), hyoscine (spasmopan, buscopan),prifinium (Riabal)
- Antimuscarinic agents such as Mebeverine (Duspatalin) act directly on the gut muscles at the cellular level to relax them. It's also an inhibitor of calcium-depot replenishment. To normalize the small bowel motility.
- Anti-anxiety with anti-cholinergic (antispasmodic & antisecretory) agents as a combination such as chlordiazepoxide with clinidium (Poxidium, librax), which is very effective for patients in whom anxiety & tension are the main causes of spasms.
- Spasmocanulase, a combination of drugs & enzymes that works smaltaneously for colic abdominal pain, dyspepsia, & bloating.



Note: - Antidepressants such as amitriptyline (tryptizol), or anti-anxiety agents such as paroxetine (seroxate) are sometimes used for IBS symptomatic relief.

- Medications for IBS won't treat the disease itself, but they will help the patient controlling his symptoms & dealing with them.

What about food??

Managing the diet of IBS patient can be tricky.

- People with IBS can keep a symptom journal of what they eat during the day, what symptoms they have, when symptoms occur, & what foods always make them feel sick, to figure out what triggers their illness and how best to avoid those triggers.
- Patients need to compensate for fluid loss, & the reduced absorption capacity in their bowels.

Ensure having additional amounts of water, & electrolytes to help replenish loss due to persistent diarrhea, especially during acute flares.

- The following points may help *prevent or relieve* some IBS symptoms:

- Having meals, as five to six small divided meals throughout the day, instead of less-frequent big meals.
- Avoiding carbonated & caffeine containing beverages because it stimulates bowel movement, so it may cause diarrhea, plus it increases acid production.
- Focusing in the meals on proteins, simple carbohydrates & sugars as a main source of energy, & amino acids instead of fats.
- Limit the intake of fatty foods, especially during acute episodes, because fats increase gut sensations, which can make abdominal pain seem worse.
- Fibers, such as full wheat bread, legumes & fruits should be generally avoided during acute flares, since it may increase diarrhea.

After symptoms improve (at remission episodes) small amounts of fiber containing food like oat & bran can be added to maintain normal bowel movement, & prevent constipation, with drinking large amount of water.

- Dairy products, should generally avoided in acute flares & if diarrhea & gases are the main symptoms, but during remission episodes sensible amounts of milk, cheese, or butter should be consumed since it's a rich source of calcium & protein

(In case of lactose intolerance patient may use lactose-free soya milk)

- Fruit juice, chocolates, spices, onion & artificial sweeteners such as sorbitol aspartame, shouldn't be used in large amounts.
- Patient should also avoid canned food that contains large amounts of preservatives.

Advised supplements for IBS patients:

- **Probiotics:** people with irritable bowel syndrome may not have enough good bacteria, which aids in food digestion.
- Drinking **peppermint water** can help reducing spasms & gases.