

## Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a complex disorder that affects the large intestine and is experienced by as many as 20 percent of the adult population. It occurs more often in women than men and frequently begins in adolescence or early adulthood.

IBS commonly causes chronic and intermittent cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, constipation, and diarrhea. Fortunately, most people can control symptoms with diet, stress management, and medication.

### Causes

It's not known exactly what causes the irregularity of intestinal contractions that result in abdominal pain with alternating constipation and diarrhea. Triggers for episodes can include foods such as grains that contain gluten (primarily wheat, rye, and barley), chocolate, dairy products, alcohol, caffeine, emotional stress, and some medications.

Many people with IBS experience flare-ups when they eat certain foods. Chocolate, milk, and alcohol frequently trigger diarrhea or constipation. Carbonated beverages as well as some raw fruits and vegetables, especially cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower, can cause bloating and gas.

Most individuals find that they experience more pain as the colon becomes increasingly spasmodic during stressful times. Researchers believe that hormones may play a part as many women have a harder time controlling symptoms around the time of their menstrual periods.

### Treatment

There are a number of things that can help regulate bowel functioning and reduce the spasticity that characterizes IBS. Besides stress management techniques and elimination of problematic food and drink, some of the following may help decrease symptoms.

1. Keep a dietary journal to identify foods and beverages that cause distress.
2. If constipation is a problem, increase your intake of high-fiber foods such as bran cereal, whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
3. Physical activity is helpful as exercise stimulates normal intestinal contractions and reduces stress.
4. Peppermint relaxes smooth muscles in the intestines so may reduce spasms. The enteric-coated capsules are the best choice as they won't dissolve before reaching the small intestines. However, in those with reflux or heartburn, mint can worsen symptoms.

6. A trained hypnotist can sometimes assist an individual in relaxing the abdominal muscles which may help reduce pain and bloating.
7. For some, taking a food or supplement that contains beneficial bacteria eases symptoms. Cultured dairy products such as Activia and Stonyfield Farms yogurt are high in gut-friendly microorganisms. Probiotic supplements are also available over the counter.
8. Small, frequent meals are less likely to result in cramping and diarrhea than large or heavy meals. Lower-fat foods are easier to digest than rich food and drinks.

## Self-care and diet are key

Although Irritable Bowel Syndrome is a chronic condition, it is not related to inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn's and ulcerative colitis, nor does it result in permanent damage. There are generally times when flare-ups occur, but with good management, IBS can often be controlled to the extent that signs and symptoms are minimal.



*Managing stress through exercise, yoga or some other relaxation technique helps keep IBS symptoms under control.*

---

## References

Irritable Bowel Syndrome. (Year unknown) Google Health [On-line]. Available: <https://www.google.com/health/ref/Irritable+bowel+syndrome>.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome. (July 29, 2009) Mayo Clinic [On-line]. Available: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/irritable-bowel-syndrome/DS00106>.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome. (September 2007) National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse [On-line]. Available: <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/ibs/>.

Alterations in Intestinal Serotonin in Irritable Bowel Syndrome and Dyspepsia. (May 21, 2007) Bio-medicine [On-line]. Available: <http://www.bio-medicine.org/medicine-technology/Alterations-in-Intestinal-Serotonin-in-Irritable-Bowel-Syndrome-and-0ADyspepsia-671-1/>.

Copyright©2009 Haven Hospice