

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

A Condition which causes abdominal pain and disturbs bowel action.

What to look for

- [Constipation](#) or diarrhoea shortly after meals, usually accompanied by cramps or bloating and gas.
- Abnormal bowel movements.

Your digestive system seems totally out of control. Either you can't stay out of the bathroom, or your stomach is tied in knots. Your bowel movements alternate between loose and hard.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is the most common of all digestive disorders. The symptoms mentioned above usually follow the consumption of foods. Whatever the specific symptoms, your digestion seems normal but your bowel movements become abnormal and stay that way for several weeks or longer.

Causes

As part of the digestive process, the intestines move food through the intestinal tract by contractions called peristalsis. Irritable bowel syndrome occurs when peristalsis becomes irregular and awkward, disrupting the normal digestive process resulting in smaller ill-formed motions and a feeling that you have not quite emptied your bowels. IBS usually strikes without warning, and most sufferers have bowel movements more frequently than normal, although some become constipated.

There is no known cause of IBS. However many authorities consider stress is the culprit and even [depression](#). While others are adamant that food sensitivities and allergies are the cause.

Overeating, or binge eating, is known to aggravate IBS, as is too much fat in the diet.

Lactose intolerance, eating irregularly or too quickly, and smoking may all be factors in IBS. Some sugar substitutes, antibiotics and other drugs may have diarrhoea as their side effect.

Traditional Treatment

Doctors focus mainly on relief of symptoms as the cause of the ailment is still a mystery.

Your diet may be examined first of all and if it is inadequate, your doctor may suggest a more balanced and healthy one for you.

Alternative/Natural Treatments

Various herbal and dietary remedies may be effective in preventing or soothing the discomfort of diarrhoea and constipation.

Exercise – try to get routine exercise as this can get your system moving as well as relaxing the body. try to get routine exercise as this can get your system moving as well as relaxing the body.

Herbal Therapies – To calm an overactive gastrointestinal tract, peppermint oil capsules are a favourite of many people. Try peppermint tea. Infusions of chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*), marsh-mallow (*Althaea officinalis*) root, bayberry (*Myrica* spp.), or slippery elm (*Ulmus fulva*) also are soothing to the intestinal tract and can be made the same way.

Ginger is another herb reputed to be beneficial for this problem.

Try plain yogurt daily to get your digestive tract in order.

Homoeopathy – [Ignatia](#) may be helpful if you are having spasms of pain and diarrhoea after emotional upsets. If you are passing offensive-smelling gas and mucus in the motions, take [Mercurius vivus](#). If sudden cramp like pains are relieved by bending over, take *Colocynthis*. If your stools are soft but you have to strain to pass them, try [Nux vomica](#).

Lifestyle – A number of techniques have been found helpful for this complaint, including training in muscle relaxation. A number of techniques have been found helpful for this complaint, including training in muscle relaxation.

Of all the relaxation techniques, the most familiar may be hypnotherapy. A practitioner uses the power of suggestion to teach a patient in a hypnotic state how to relax the smooth muscles of the intestines. Guided imagery, often taught by yoga instructors and massage therapists may also teach you new ways to relax yourself.

Dietary Considerations

Certain foods may contribute to IBS by irritating your gastrointestinal tract. Fatty foods are very hard for some people's digestive systems to handle and consequently can cause this problem. Other known irritants to some people's digestive tracts are eggs and dairy products, spicy foods, and coffee, especially decaffeinated.

Increase the amount of fibre in your diet by eating more fresh fruit and vegetables.

A diet rich in grains such as oats, fresh fruit and vegetables, cooked dried beans. Live yoghurt helps this condition.

When to seek further professional advice

- You discover blood in your stools
- You have a fever, or you have been losing weight unexpectedly
- You have mucus in your stools