

Irritable Bowel Syndrome – Symptoms & Treatment

Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or "IBS," is a chronic condition that causes diffuse, cramping abdominal pain associated with bowel movement disorders. Some people with IBS may have frequent, watery bowel movements (diarrhea), others may complain of constipation. Some patients switch back and forth between diarrhea and constipation.

The most common symptoms include: Stomachache and cramps related to and often relieved by bowel movement, diarrhea or constipation and bloating. Diagnosis of exclusion is made based on clinical presentation only since there is no specific test to confirm IBS. Your doctor can figure out if you have IBS by asking you a few questions, and by running tests to make sure you do not have something other than IBS. Many medical conditions can cause the same symptoms as IBS, so it is important that your primary care provider check for other possibilities.

You can help yourself by keeping track each day of what you eat, what you did, and how you felt. That way, you can figure out if anything specifically that you do or eat makes your symptoms better or worse. Stop eating foods that might be making your IBS worse. Start by giving up foods that give you gas. Then give up milk, ice cream, and other foods that have traces of milk for two weeks. Eat more fiber, if you have constipation. You can do this by eating more fruits and vegetables. Or, you can take fiber pills or powders.

Studies show that being active and exercising for 20 to 60 minutes, three to five days a week helps improve IBS symptoms. Medicines can ease the symptoms of IBS, too, but no treatment can cure the condition. Counseling might also help with IBS because stress and anxiety can worsen the condition.

Medications that can help with IBS symptoms include: Medicines to ease diarrhea, medicines to ease constipation, antidepressants – these medicines work by blocking pain. When used to treat IBS, they are given at a much lower dose than would normally be given to treat depression. Additionally, your provider might prescribe medicines called "antispasmodics", or antibiotics as these medicines sometimes help with bloating and diarrhea in some people.

Most individuals with IBS have the condition for the remainder of their life. Even so, most people find ways to improve their symptoms. The key is to keep working with your care provider to find an approach that works best for you.



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