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## Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

**Irritable bowel syndrome** is no longer thought to be just a disorder of the intestines. IBS is now known as a gut –brain disorder. No structural abnormalities of the bowel are present with IBS therefore it is called a functional bowel disorder.

### Symptoms

The most common symptom is chronic or reoccurring pain or discomfort in the abdomen on average at least 1 day per week. The pain happens at the time of abnormal bowel movements (either constipation or diarrhea or more or less frequent stools). The pain can be either relieved or worsened by having a bowel movement. The abdominal pain is often described as crampy, sharp, dull, gas-like. There are usually more symptoms after a meal or with stress.

More than 10 % of adults have IBS. IBS is more common in women.

IBS can have a tendency to be inherited (run in families).

Many women with IBS also have other chronic pain conditions such as bladder pain, vulvodynia, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, chronic headache, low back pain, or endometriosis.

### Main causes of IBS

It is not clear what causes IBS. Problems digesting certain foods, stress and anxiety, hormonal changes, hypersensitivity of the intestines, changes in the bacteria in the gut, and problems with the way signals are sent between the brain and the digestive tract can all be involved.

### Treatment

*Diet change.* Avoiding foods that trigger IBS and eating smaller meals helps to manage the symptoms. Also, adding fiber to the diet if constipation is associated with IBS symptoms can help, but some have more symptoms with increase in dietary fiber. Both can be tried. Sometimes avoiding lactose or gluten can help. Others may do well on a low-FODMAP diet. The FODMAP diet avoids certain types of food sugars and can be discussed with your doctor or found online.

*Medications* are used in the form of neurologic pain medication to help gain relief when the symptoms are milder. Antidepressants and antispasmodics are used when the abdominal pain is more severe.

Probiotics can also be used to help balance out the digestive system.

*Stress Management* is used to help the brain –gut nerves be less sensitive to pain. Cognitive behavioral therapy, yoga and mindfulness-based meditation can reduce abdominal discomfort and the psychological distress associated with IBS symptoms, improve coping skills, and help patients adapt to their symptoms.

**For more information on irritable bowel syndrome visit:**

[www.pelvicpain.org](http://www.pelvicpain.org)

[www.gastro.org](http://www.gastro.org)

[www.aboutibs.org](http://www.aboutibs.org)