



IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS)

What is it?

IBS is also known as spastic colitis. It is a very common condition that causes changes in bowel habits and digestive upsets. The large intestine (colon) doesn't function properly.

Symptoms

The main signs and symptoms of IBS include:

- Abdominal pain or cramping
- A bloated feeling or sensation of fullness even after light meals
- Nausea, poor appetite
- Gas (flatulence)
- Alternating between diarrhoea and constipation
- Mucus in the stools
- Anxiety or depression.

Why it happens?

There are a number of reasons that may cause IBS and these include:

- The nerves and muscles that line the intestinal wall normally contract and relax as move food through the digestive tract. With IBS these nerves and muscles are very sensitive and cause strong painful contractions resulting in the food being passed through too fast, resulting in poor digestion, bloating, gas and diarrhoea. Sometimes the food passes too slow causing constipation.
- Hormonal changes in women – IBS flare ups are common during or around the menstrual periods.
- Genetic tendency

Triggers will tend to vary from person to person. Certain foods may trigger IBS symptoms. Stress and anxiety aggravate IBS.

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Did you know?

- If you experience any of these symptoms, consult your healthcare professional to get a proper diagnosis. Symptoms of IBS are very similar to other diseases such as coeliac disease, lactose intolerance and intestinal infections.
- Once you have been diagnosed with IBS start a food diary. Record all food and beverages and times taken, your daily activities and the time of IBS symptoms. This information will help to sort out what aggravates your symptoms.
- From your food diary you may find certain foods aggravate your symptoms. It may be best to limit these foods. Usually foods that cause excessive gas are a problem such as cabbage and legumes.
- If stress is a factor look at what is stressing you out and find ways to work around it. Talking to someone may help to find a solution. Regular exercise and meditation can reduce stress.
- Eating at regular times and 5-6 small meals rather than three large meals can place less stress on the intestines.
- When constipation is a problem, increase fibre in the diet slowly to give the gastrointestinal tract time to adapt and minimise gas, bloating or cramping.
- Adults should aim to consume 25 to 35 grams daily of dietary fibre. You may find some fibres suit you better than others.
- Only resort to laxatives when it is absolutely necessary - your bowels can slacken off due to laxative abuse!! Also laxatives can trigger IBS symptoms.



IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS) continued

What natural therapies can help?

Psyllium husks 10–20 g daily has been shown to help ease constipation.

Aloe vera – the polysaccharides in the aloe vera inner leaf help relieve the symptoms of IBS such as diarrhoea, abdominal pain, bloating and flatulence.

Peppermint oil, chamomile, fennel and ginger can aid digestion and reduce symptoms such as bloating and abdominal cramps.

Probiotics provide a protective barrier in our digestive system, thus helping prevent bad bacteria residing in these areas. Studies show that *Lactobacillus plantarum* and *Bifidobacterium infantis* improve symptoms such as abdominal pain, bloating and stool frequency or constipation.

Magnesium and **calcium** are important for proper nerve transmission and muscle contraction. They may be beneficial for the nerves and muscle in the colon.

B group vitamins – support the nervous system.

THIS INFORMATION IS NOT INTENDED TO TREAT OR DIAGNOSE. ALWAYS CONSULT YOUR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL BEFORE TAKING NUTRITIONAL OR HERBAL SUPPLEMENTS.