

PATIENT INFORMATION

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS)

What is it?

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a chronic clinical problem which includes a combination of abdominal pain and altered bowel habits. Patients may also suffer from a range of associated problems such as the feeling of incomplete emptying of the bowel, peculiar shape of their stool, discharge of mucus, the sensation of bloating, excessive gas, and abdominal distension. IBS can manifest itself in different degrees of severity. In its most devastating form, symptoms are longstanding, incapacitating, nearly constant, and have little correlation with food intake or bowel movement. In its milder form, symptoms may have flared only within the last few years and are closely related to food intake or bowel movement. Regardless of its severity, IBS is a chronic, frequently lifelong disease.

Who may be affected?

IBS is an extremely common problem, affecting as many as 40 million Americans. Sufferers of IBS make up almost half the patients seen by gastroenterologists (bowel specialists). Interestingly, about 8 million more Americans experience similar, less severe symptoms that do not interfere with their lives or prompt them to see a doctor.

What causes it?

It has long been thought that spasms of the colon or psychiatric factors were the cause of this syndrome. Even though such factors may be associated with IBS in certain patients, they don't seem to play a major role in causing IBS in the first place. In the past few years, scientists have identified a specific abnormality in the sigmoid colon and rectum that can explain most of the symptoms of IBS (such as bloating, gas, fullness, or constipation). This abnormality is an increased sensitivity of sensors within the bowel wall. This internal hypersensitivity is comparable to what occurs when you have sunburn; the slightest touch or even breeze can be painful while unburned skin will hardly feel the same stimulus. For someone with the hypersensitivity, normal contraction and expansion of the rectum or colon can result in intense sensations. It therefore appears that most of the symptoms of IBS are due to an excessive perception of internal sensations. Frequently, other symptoms of hyper-sensitivity are associated with IBS.

A patient may experience headaches, lower back pain, or pain during intercourse. This may be related to the fact that whatever mechanisms cause the hypersensitivity in the colon can also have the same effect on other parts of the body. Why this hypersensitivity develops is not yet understood. There may be genetic factors that make an individual susceptible to this problem. However, once someone is susceptible, factors in that person's environment become the most important triggers and aggravating forces.

What affects the problem?

Even just drinking water can cause bloating in some patients. For others, specific food items may cause or be related to distension of the stomach. Spices, milk products, artificial sweeteners, acids, and fats all interact with the same nerve receptors in the gut that are affected by IBS. Unresolved emotional problems, interrupted sleep patterns, grieving, depression, and anxiety can also trigger symptoms. So can situations an individual may perceive (consciously or unconsciously) as stressful. Most often, symptoms are triggered by a combination of factors.

What can be done?

IBS cannot be cured, but it can be controlled in many cases. While scientists try to discover the causes of hypersensitivity and develop more effective medications, the goal of treatment is to reduce the severity of symptoms to a level where they do not interfere with the person's lifestyle. The first step is seeing a physician who can rule out other treatable conditions and establish a firm diagnosis of IBS. Some physical abnormalities can be corrected with surgery, while medications can relieve some diarrhea, constipation, and pain. For most IBS patients, the gastroenterologist will identify specific triggers (dietary, behavioral, or psychological) so that a "custom-tailored" treatment can be planned. Therapies may include medications, relaxation training, short-term psychotherapy, acupuncture, and dietary counseling. Usually a combination of therapies is most effective. In general, a good response to treatment is more likely when symptoms are related to specific dietary or behavioral triggers, when onset or worsening of the problem is relatively recent, and when the patient accepts the special nature of the disease.

What can I do?

Should problems develop, seek a thorough evaluation and counseling from a physician familiar with the variety of causes and treatments for bowel disorders, such as a gastroenterologist. Keeping a diary of foods eaten or circumstances that worsen the problem can help provide information to your physician. And, since the problem is largely one of hypersensitivity, cooperate with your physician to understand your problem and follow recommendations.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IRRITABLE BOWEL

WHAT NOT TO EAT

FOODS TO AVOID

1. Raw fruit
2. **Raw vegetables:**
(Esp. broccoli, cabbage, Brussel sprouts, cauliflower, onions, radish, eggplant, celery)
3. Popcorn
4. Fried foods
5. **Nuts and Seeds**
6. Tomato Sauce, **Spicy foods**
7. Mayonnaise, Miracle Whip
8. Most "fast foods" (e.g. French fries, hamburgers, hot dogs, potato chips)
9. Rich foods (e.g. chocolate cake, cookies)
10. **Beans** (pinto beans, red beans, chili, burritos)
11. Salads (or any foods that contain lettuce, cucumbers, etc.)
12. **Whole wheat product**
13. **Sugarless products (candy, gum)**
14. **Fructose containing products**

DRINKS TO AVOID:

1. **Soda** (esp. from a bottle)
2. Milk, Ice Cream
3. Alcohol
4. Caffeinated beverages
(i.e., coffee, tea, etc.)

MEDICINE TO AVOID:

1. Aspirin
2. Non-steroidal medication (i.e., Advil, ibuprofen, Alleve, etc.)

WHAT TO EAT

FOODS:

1. Cooked canned vegetables
(except cabbage)
2. Meat, poultry and fish
(not deep fried, beef Rarely)
3. Dairy-Cheese, Yogurt, etc.
(limited amounts)
4. Toast, rice, muffins, bagels
5. Soup
6. Most sandwiches
(turkey, ham, chicken, bread)
7. Tofu

DRINKS

1. Juice
(without pulp)
2. Water
3. Iced tea

MEDICINES AS NEEDED

1. Acetaminophen
(Tylenol)

ALSO RECOMMENDED:

1. **Daily soluble fiber supplements** to produce soft, "fluffy" stools. This should be taken with at least 8 to 10 glasses of fluid per day. [i.e., Psyllium (Metamucil), Fibercon, Citrucel, etc.] High fiber foods can be eaten, but should be added to your diet slowly.
2. If you suspect lactose intolerance **try a completely milk and milk product free diet for one week.** If this is effective, you can try Using lactatase enzyme products with milk containing foods (eg. Lactaid, etc.)
3. **BEANO** is an enzyme product that may be useful to eat before beans, raw vegetables, grains, nuts and seeds which increase gas production.