

Fuel 4 Women



KSC/CCAFS HEALTH EDUCATION AND WELLNESS PROGRAM

Irritable Bowel Syndrome July 2006

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

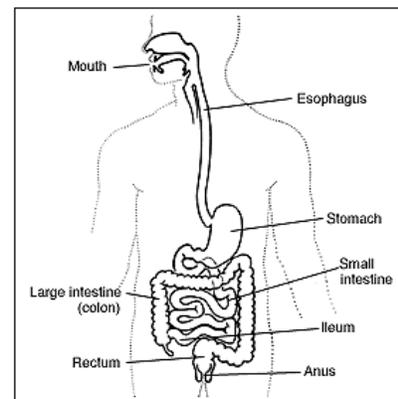
Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common medical disorder that is characterized by chronic abdominal discomfort or pain, bloating and changes in bowel habits. The abdominal pain or cramping can be a dull ache and, for some women, it can be intolerable and without relief. It can also lead to a tired feeling and even mild depression. Some people with IBS suffer from constipation, others from diarrhea and some people experience bouts of both. Symptoms associated with IBS include bloating, passage of mucus or straining with bowel movements, a sense of incomplete evacuation after bowel movements, or a sense of urgency to move the bowels.

According to the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD), approximately 15 to 20 percent of all U.S. adults experience symptoms of IBS, which may involve an abnormality of the contractions of the colon, as well as an increased sensitivity of the nerves in the colon. The syndrome can affect men and women of all ages, but it most often strikes younger women. IBS generally first appears in people in their 20s to 40s, and women are roughly three times more likely than men to suffer from it.

What are the Symptoms of IBS?

Abdominal pain, bloating, and discomfort are the main symptoms of IBS. However, symptoms can vary from person to person. Some people have constipation, which means hard, difficult-to-pass, or infrequent bowel movements. Often these people report straining and cramping when trying to have a bowel movement but cannot eliminate any stool, or they are able to eliminate only a small amount. If they are able to have a bowel movement, there may be mucus in it, which is a fluid that moistens and protect passages in the digestive system.

Some people with IBS experience diarrhea, which is frequent, loose, watery, stools. People with diarrhea frequently feel an urgent and uncontrollable need to have a bowel movement. Other people with IBS alternate between constipation and diarrhea.



Sometimes people find that their symptoms subside for a few months and then return, while others report a constant worsening of symptoms over time.

What Causes IBS?

Researchers have yet to discover any specific cause for IBS. One theory is that people who suffer from IBS have a colon (large bowel) that is particularly sensitive and reactive to certain foods and stress. The immune system, which fights infection, may also be involved.

- Normal motility, or movement, may not be present in a colon of a person who has IBS. It can be spasmodic or can even stop working temporarily. Spasms are sudden strong muscle contractions that come and go.
- The lining of the colon called the epithelium, which is affected by the immune and nervous systems, regulates the flow of fluids in and out of the colon. In IBS, the epithelium appears to work properly. However, when the contents inside the colon move too quickly, the colon loses its ability to absorb fluids. The result is too much fluid in the stool. In other people, the movement inside the colon is too slow, which causes extra fluid to be absorbed. As a result, a person develops constipation.
- A person's colon may respond strongly to stimuli such as certain foods or stress that would not bother most people.

Recent research has reported that serotonin is linked with normal gastrointestinal (GI) functioning. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter, or chemical, that delivers messages from one part of your body to another. Ninety-five percent of the serotonin in your body is located in the GI tract, and the other 5 percent is found in the brain. Cells that line the inside of the bowel work as transporters and carry the serotonin out of the GI tract. People with IBS, however, have diminished receptor activity, causing abnormal levels of serotonin to exist in the GI tract. As a result, people with IBS experience problems with bowel movement, motility, and sensation—having more sensitive pain receptors in their GI tract.

In addition, people with IBS frequently suffer from depression and anxiety, which can worsen symptoms. Similarly, the symptoms associated with IBS can cause a person to feel depressed and anxious.

Researchers have reported that IBS may be caused by a bacterial infection in the gastrointestinal tract. Studies show that people who have had gastroenteritis sometimes develop IBS, otherwise called post-infectious IBS.

Researchers have also found very mild celiac disease in some people with symptoms similar to IBS. People with celiac disease cannot digest gluten, a substance found in

wheat, rye, and barley. People with celiac disease cannot eat these foods without becoming very sick because their immune system responds by damaging the small intestine. A blood test can determine whether celiac disease may be present.

The following have been associated with a worsening of IBS symptoms

- large meals
- bloating from gas in the colon
- medicines
- wheat, rye, barley, chocolate, milk products, or alcohol
- drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea, or colas
- stress, conflict, or emotional upsets

Researchers have found that women with IBS may have more symptoms during their menstrual periods, suggesting that reproductive hormones can worsen IBS problems.

IBS Prevention

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) isn't a condition that can be "prevented." It's not a condition you can avoid. Rather, its symptoms-chronic abdominal cramping, discomfort or pain, bloating and changes in bowel habits-can be managed, often minimized and sometimes eliminated by recognizing what triggers them and addressing the triggers.

People with IBS have colons that are more sensitive to and overreact to both dietary (even to normal gastrointestinal activity) and environmental stimuli, like stress.

Quick Facts

- IBS is a functional disorder in which the bowel doesn't work as it should.
- IBS doesn't damage the bowel.
- IBS symptoms affect up to 20 percent of the general population. It is the most common disorder diagnosed by gastroenterologists, and is among the most common health disorders in general.



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Jessica Crews, BS, CHES, ACSM HFI
Jessica.Crews@jrbosc.ksc.nasa.gov
(321) 867-4566

- ◆ *Educating women about their health*
- ◆ *Encouraging women to act against disease*

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RESOURCES

National Women's Health Resource Center
www.healthywomen.org

National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse
<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov>