



## HEALTH INFORMATION

# Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is one of the most common digestive conditions with an estimated 10-20% of people in England suffering from the condition. IBS can be a chronic (long-term) condition where the normal functions of the bowel can be disrupted. It is often not a serious condition, although its symptoms can be unpleasant. It can cause bouts of stomach cramps, bloating, diarrhoea and constipation.

## What causes IBS?

The exact cause of IBS is unknown, but most experts agree it's related to an increased sensitivity of the entire gut, which can occasionally be linked to a prior food-related illness.

## The most common symptoms of IBS are:

- abdominal pain and cramping - often relieved by emptying your bowels
- a change in your bowel habits - such as diarrhoea, constipation, or sometimes both (see below)
- bloating and swelling of your abdomen
- excessive wind (flatulence)
- an urgent need to go to the toilet
- a feeling that you need to open your bowels even if constipation, or sometimes both (see below)
- a feeling you have not fully emptied your bowels
- passing mucus from your back passage

IBS is twice as common in women than men and usually begins in early adulthood (20-30 years old). If you persistently experience any of the above symptoms then you should visit your GP.

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## Bowel symptoms

There are three main patterns of bowel symptoms in IBS. They are:

- IBS with diarrhoea - when you have repeated bouts of diarrhoea
- IBS with constipation - when you have repeated bouts of constipation
- IBS mixed - when you have repeated bouts of diarrhoea and constipation

The symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) can often be reduced

by changing your diet and lifestyle, and understanding the nature of the condition. In some cases, medication or psychological treatments may also be helpful.

## Treating IBS:

**Diet** People with IBS are often advised to modify the amount of fibre in their diet. Your GP can advise you on what your recommended fibre intake should be as this varies for each person.

**Exercise** 30 minutes of exercise a day can help to relieve the symptoms of IBS

**Probiotics** Probiotics are dietary supplements that contain 'friendly bacteria' and are available at most supermarkets and help to relieve symptoms

**Stress** If you are stressed, you may benefit from a talking therapy, such as stress counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

**Medication** In more severe case your GP may advise a course of medication to help treat IBS



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