

# Irritable bowel syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a problem that mostly affects the bowel (the large intestine) and is not caused by any other bowel disease. It can be painful, does not damage the colon or lead to other health problems.

## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Gas, bloating, pain, or discomfort in the abdomen
- Chronic diarrhea, constipation (or both)
- Mucus in the stool

## CAUSES

The cause is not known. A person with IBS has an extra sensitive colon. Muscles in the intestines go into spasm, causing symptoms.

## TREATMENT

Changes in eating habits, stress relief, and medications treat IBS.



## SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

### TRIAGE QUESTIONS

Do you have very severe abdominal pain or tarlike, maroon, or bloody-colored stools?

NO

YES

▶ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**

Do you have any of these problems?

- A lot of mucus in your stools
- A fever with cramps, pain in the abdomen, or diarrhea
- Unwanted weight loss
- IBS symptoms change a lot or get worse

NO

YES

▶ **SEE DOCTOR**

**USE SELF-CARE**

- Don't smoke. If you smoke, quit. Avoid secondhand smoke.
- Keep a log of when symptoms occur. Avoid things that trigger symptoms. Common ones include large meals; fried foods; kidney and other beans; cabbage; broccoli; dairy products with milk sugar (lactose); chocolate; spicy foods; and the artificial sweetener sorbitol.
- Eat fiber-rich foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and beans. Add fiber slowly to give your gut time to adjust. Try adding supplemental fiber like Metamucil. Some people find relief by limiting dairy foods, avoiding gluten, and limiting foods that make you gassy, like cabbage and carbonated drinks.
- Take an over-the-counter pain reliever as directed. Put a hot water bottle or heating pad (set on low) on your abdomen. Try to relax.
- Manage stress.
- Drink lots of water. Don't have alcohol and caffeine.
- Get enough rest. Get regular exercise.