

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

In the Clinic  
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## What Is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a problem that affects your large intestine. Symptoms include stomach pain, cramps, discomfort, bloating, and abnormal bowel movements. It is more common in women than in men. Its exact cause is unknown.

## What Are the Warning Signs?

People with IBS can have many different symptoms. In general, warning signs include stomach pain or discomfort that happens along with diarrhea, constipation, or both. Other symptoms may include the following:

- An abnormal number of bowel movements
  - More than 3 per day
  - Fewer than 3 per week
- Urgency of bowel movements
- Straining during bowel movements
- Feeling that a bowel movement is not finished
- More gas than usual
- Tiredness
- Muscle pain
- Trouble sleeping

If these symptoms occur with weight loss, fever, blood in the stool, or recent use of antibiotics, IBS is usually not the cause.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

There is no specific test for IBS. Your doctor will ask you about your medical history and your symptoms and may do a physical examination to make a diagnosis. Endoscopy or imaging tests, such as CT scans, are usually not needed to diagnose IBS. Your doctor may ask you to have certain tests to make sure there is not another disease causing the symptoms, especially if you have any of the following:

- Weight loss, bloody stool, fever, or waking up at night due to pain
- Recent use of antibiotics
- A family history of colon cancer or inflammatory bowel disease.

## How Is It Treated?

Changing what you eat can sometimes help.

- Foods to avoid include the following:
- Fatty foods
  - Certain vegetables like beans, cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower
  - Drinks with a lot of caffeine or carbonation (such as soda)
  - Foods that are very high in fiber (which can cause gas or bloating)



- Foods that are low in fiber (which can cause constipation)

Other possible ways to treat IBS include the following:

- Stress management, such as
  - Counseling
  - Meditation
  - Regular exercise
  - Yoga
  - Getting enough sleep
- Behavioral therapies (if the IBS is related to a psychological condition)
- Medicines that target your symptoms

## Questions for My Doctor

- What can trigger IBS?
- What food or drinks should I stay away from?
- What other lifestyle changes do I need to make?
- Is there a medicine I can take to treat my symptoms?
- What are the side effects of the medicine I will be taking?
- Could stress be causing my IBS?
- Should I have an imaging study to see if it really is IBS?

## For More Information



### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/irritablebowelsyndrome.html>

### American Academy of Family Physicians

<https://familydoctor.org/condition/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/#overview>

### American Gastroenterological Association

[www.gastro.org/info\\_for\\_patients/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs-101-what-is-irritable-bowel-syndrome](http://www.gastro.org/info_for_patients/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs-101-what-is-irritable-bowel-syndrome)