



A significant proportion of people who are investigated by a hospital clinic for disordered bowel habit will have IBS. Before reaching this diagnosis a number of tests will have been performed by your doctor to exclude other dangerous or troublesome bowel conditions. These tests may include endoscopic examination of the bowel, x-rays, blood and stool tests.

### What IBS is not

IBS is not an infection of the bowel or an inflammatory condition such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. It is not bowel cancer, it is not a food allergy and it is neither a hereditary condition nor a transmitted disease.

### What is IBS

IBS is a functional bowel disorder. A functional bowel disorder (rather than an organic disorder such as cancer or colitis) is one where the normal action of the bowel is impaired.

The bowel is a long muscular tube which is responsible for transporting its contents from one end to the other. When this function is disordered a variety of symptoms may result. Under or over contraction of the colonic muscles or propulsion of faecal material that is either too fast or too slow can all give rise to symptoms. There is no abnormality within the bowel or its wall that is visible to the naked eye, on x-ray or under examination of the microscope. IBS is often confused with inflammatory bowel disease.

### Who gets IBS

Anyone can develop IBS but it is most common in the age range of 15 to 40 years and is also more common in women. Up to a 1/3rd of people in the United Kingdom at sometime will have occasional symptoms attributable to IBS. Up to 1 in 10 of the UK population may at sometime seek help from a hospital doctor for the condition.

### What symptoms may occur

Patients may experience one or all of the following at any time.

**Abdominal pain** – This is usually colicky or cramp-like in nature. It may occur anywhere but in the lower part of the abdomen and on the left hand side is most common. It is often relieved by passing flatus or by opening the bowels.

**Bloating** – A sensation of or actual abdominal distension, which may be accompanied by rumbling or gurgling noises.

**Abnormal bowel habit** – Diarrhoea and/or constipation, more or less frequent bowel motions and the passage of mucous are common symptoms.

**Tenesmus** – A feeling of incomplete evacuation of the bowels.

**Dyspepsia** – The sensation of fullness or nausea, which may be associated with belching and in severe cases vomiting.

### What is the cause of IBS

It is largely unknown although some doctors believe that IBS may be precipitated by a bout of gastroenteritis. Symptoms may be exacerbated by inadequate consumption of dietary fibre or indeed an excess of it or other food stuffs (see below). Stress is well recognised as making IBS symptoms worse and it may also be the case that sufferers tend to be those of a more anxious disposition although this is not true of everyone.

### What treatment is available

#### Reassurance

That symptoms do not relate to a serious or dangerous underlying condition often improves the symptoms of IBS.

#### Dietary modification

Increasing fibre intake (cereal, dried fruit and vegetables).

Trying dietary exclusions such as removing milk and dairy products from the diet (lactose) or at least reducing it. Avoiding highly refined or processed foods.

Other patients may find reduction in the amount of consumed fibre improve symptoms.

Avoidance of alcohol (especially lager), tea, coffee, smoking, slimming products, rich and spicy foods and those foods high in fat.

Avoid Fructose/Sorbitol.

#### Medication

Bran supplements such as Fybogel, Regulan and Metamucil (discontinue if symptoms worsen).

Antispasmodic drugs such as peppermint oil, Mebeverine and Buscopan.

Anti-diarrhoeal drugs such as Imodium.

Laxatives such as Lactulose  
Antidepressants

#### Relaxation techniques

Although irritable bowel syndrome may be very troubling and unpleasant for an individual, these symptoms never lead to more serious bowel complication such as obstruction or perforation. The majority patients who commit themselves to the treatment options above will find considerable symptomatic relief from their condition.



### Useful Websites

[www.digestivedisorders.org.uk](http://www.digestivedisorders.org.uk)  
[www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/386](http://www.patient.co.uk/showdoc/386)  
[www.netdoctor.co.uk/diseases/facts/irritablecolon.htm](http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/diseases/facts/irritablecolon.htm)  
[www.ibspage.com](http://www.ibspage.com)  
[www.ibs-symptom-relief.co.uk](http://www.ibs-symptom-relief.co.uk)