



CONTACT NEMS

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### WHAT IS IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a disorder commonly characterized by the following:

- Cramping
- Abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Constipation
- Diarrhea

IBS causes a great deal of discomfort and distress for some people. They may not be able to work, attend social events, or even travel short distances.

Fortunately, IBS does not permanently harm the intestines and does not lead to other serious diseases. Most people can control their symptoms with diet, stress management, and prescribed medications.

### RISK FACTORS

You are at higher risk for IBS if you have the following:

- 35 years old or younger
- Female
- Have a family history of IBS

Please note that this information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to replace the advice of a health care professional. North East Medical Services disclaims any liability for the decisions you make based on this information.

### WARNING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Abdominal pain or discomfort that:
  - Is relieved by bowel movement
  - Changes how often you have a bowel movement
  - Changes how the stool looks
- Change in frequency and appearance of bowel movement
- Feelings of uncontrollable urgency to have a bowel movement
- Difficulty or inability to pass stool
- Mucus in the stool
- Bloating

The following have been associated with a worsening of IBS symptoms:

- Large meals
- Bloating from gas in the colon
- Certain medications
- Wheat, rye, barley, chocolate, milk products, and alcohol
- Drinks with caffeine. For example, coffee, tea, or coke
- Stress, conflict, or emotional upsets

Bleeding, fever, weight loss, and persistent severe pain are not symptoms of IBS. However, these may indicate other problems such as inflammation or, in rare cases, cancer.

### DIAGNOSIS

Your doctor can diagnose IBS based with a physical examination and knowing your complete medical history that includes a description of your symptoms. Although there is no specific test for IBS, other diagnostic tests could be done to rule out other problems, such as blood test and stool test. Based on the test results, your doctor may perform further tests like colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy.



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### TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

There are many treatment options to treat the symptoms of IBS. You can work with your doctor to find the best combination of medicine, diet, counseling, and support to control your symptoms.

#### *Changing your diet*

Careful eating can reduce symptoms of IBS. Please consult with a registered dietitian or nutritionist. They can help make changes to your diet while maintaining adequate nutrients in the foods you substitute, or take supplements for.

Diet changes include:

- Increase intake of fiber in your diet to lessen constipation
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of plain water a day, especially if you have diarrhea.
- Drink less carbonated beverages, such as sodas
- Chew less gum. Eat more slowly. Chewing gum and eating too quickly can lead to swallowing air, which then leads to gas.
- Eat smaller meals to reduce cramping and diarrhea
- Eat meals that are low in fat and high in carbohydrates unless you have celiac disease.

#### *Medication*

Your doctor may recommend some of the following medicines to reduce your symptoms:

- Fiber supplements if increasing fiber in your meal does not help
- The right kind of laxatives to help with constipation
- Antispasmodics to help control colon muscle spasms and reduce pain



#### *Managing stress*

Stress can stimulate colon spasms in people with IBS. Stress management options include:

- Stress reduction training and relaxation therapies
- Counseling and support
- Regular exercise
- Changes the stressful situations in your life
- Adequate sleep

#### SOURCES

- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

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