

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

In brief

Irritable bowel syndrome or IBS is the name given to a longstanding condition consisting of frequent abdominal pain and bowel symptoms that doctors cannot explain by any other disease.

SYMPTOMS may include:

- cramp-like abdominal pain, sometimes severe;
- an alteration in bowel habit (diarrhoea, constipation or alternating diarrhoea and constipation);
- bloating and swelling of the abdomen;
- rumbling noises and excessive passage of wind; and
- urgency – a need to rush to the toilet.

Other symptoms include: headaches, dizziness, backache, passing urine frequently, tiredness, muscle and joint pains, ringing in the ears, indigestion, belching, nausea, shortness of breath, anxiety and/or depression.

Diagnosis

IBS is the most likely diagnosis if there is bowel disturbance lasting longer than six months with abdominal pain or bloating, often with many other symptoms. If you have had these symptoms for some time, if they come and go but never completely go away, you must visit your GP. Do not self-diagnose, IBS should always be diagnosed by a qualified medical practitioner.

There is no test or marker that is specific for IBS. Doctors will carry out a careful history to identify any red flag symptoms and exclude any other serious conditions such as coeliac disease; inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis) or bowel cancer. Even if your doctor has diagnosed IBS, you should always go back to them if your symptoms change.

Who gets IBS?

We all get gut symptoms from time to time, but people with IBS get them more frequently and more severely. At any one time, between 10% and 20% of people living in western countries have symptoms of IBS.

Causes

There is no definite cause for IBS. The most common risk factors include:

- **Post Infectious IBS.** After an attack of gastroenteritis, (food poisoning), about 10% of people develop IBS.
- **Antibiotics.** The ingestion of a course of powerful antibiotics to treat life-threatening infections can severely deplete the colonic microbiome, (the bacteria that populate the colon).
- **Post Traumatic IBS.** Many people report that their IBS started after an event or a series of events that they found particularly traumatic or upsetting. Stress can increase bowel sensitivity.

Triggers

To understand IBS, it is important to distinguish between what factors may sensitize the gut and cause IBS and what then might trigger the symptoms in a sensitive gut.

Triggers can include previous trauma and stressful situations and certain types of food.

For more information about IBS visit The IBS Network website www.theibsnetwork.org.

JOIN THE IBS NETWORK – we are here to help

We understand how difficult and embarrassing it can be to talk about your symptoms. We know how your symptoms can impact on your life and how miserable they can make you feel. You are not alone. We can offer you support, advice and information to help you live a full and active life again.

Join The IBS Network and you will have access to a large, caring community of support.

As a member you'll have access to:

- our online self-care programme designed to help you better understand your IBS;
- one-to-one advice from IBS specialist health professionals through our helpline staffed by trained IBS nurses;
- ask the experts facility where you can put your questions to our team of medical professionals including gastroenterologists, dietitians and pharmacists;
- our monthly newsletter with IBS news and information;
- our quarterly magazine with features and interviews;
- a Can't Wait Card to help you gain access to toilets when you most need them;
- a selection of factsheets; and
- a library of IBS-friendly recipes.

Join today www.theibsnetwork.org or call 0114 272 3253.

The IBS Network is the national charity supporting people living with IBS. The charity receives no government funding and relies on donations. To help us continue to support those living with IBS so they do not feel alone and isolated, please consider making a one-off donation or a regular monthly donation to the charity.

Go to our website www.theibsnetwork.org and click on the donate button or call us on **0114 272 3253**.

Thank you.



Visit our website, call us or write to us at

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www.theibsnetwork.org

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