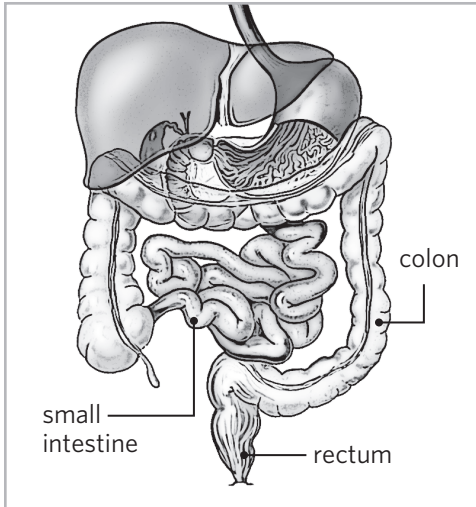


# Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)



**IBS (irritable bowel syndrome) is a condition that affects your colon and causes cramping, stomach pain, diarrhea and constipation.**

When you have IBS, the nerves and muscles in your colon are extra sensitive and don't contract like they should.

Doctors don't know what exactly causes IBS, but certain foods, medicines and stress can make symptoms worse and trigger flare-ups. You can help your IBS by making simple changes to your daily life, and your doctor may prescribe medicine.

## Symptoms and Triggers

IBS symptoms can go and come. The three main symptoms of IBS are **stomach pain, bloating** and **discomfort**. Other signs include:

- **stomach cramping**
- **passing more gas than usual**
- **diarrhea or constipation** (you may have one, then the other)
- **changes in how often you have bowel movements**
- **changes in how your stool looks**
- **mucus in your stool**

If you have IBS, your digestive system can react too strongly to triggers that don't bother most people. Some common triggers include:

- **certain foods and drinks**—like milk, cheese, alcohol, chocolate, and fried and fatty foods
- **eating large meals**
- **stress**
- **menstrual cycle** (for women)

To find out what may trigger your IBS, keep track of what you eat and drink, as well as any medicines you take. Also write down what you're doing right before symptoms start and if anything helps. Share this information with your doctor.

## Treatment

While you can't cure IBS, your doctor can recommend a treatment plan that reduces your symptoms and flare-ups. Medicines include:

- **Anticholinergics**—Also called antispasmodics, these help control painful bowel spasms, but they can make constipation worse.
- **Chloride channel activators**—These increase fluid in your colon so stool can move through more easily. This helps you have more frequent bowel movements and can help ease symptoms like pain and discomfort.
- **GC-C agonists**—These also help increase fluid in your colon so you can have more frequent bowel movements and can help ease pain.
- **Antidepressants**—Because 95 percent of your brain's mood-regulating chemical, serotonin, lives in your digestive tract, your doctor may prescribe antidepressants in low doses to help improve IBS symptoms.
- **Antidiarrheals**—These can help control diarrhea. Talk with your doctor about how much to take and how often to take them.
- **Laxatives**—These can help with constipation. But some laxatives can be addictive, so talk to your doctor about how to use them.

Treatment for IBS is different for everyone. Your doctor can help you find the best option for you.



To learn more, visit:

- **International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders**

[www.aboutibs.org](http://www.aboutibs.org)

- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases**

[www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)

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## What You Can Do

Your doctor may suggest these lifestyle changes with your treatment:

**Manage stress.** Stress can trigger symptoms. Try to identify activities that cause you stress, and make plans to avoid or cope with them. Also, make sure you're getting enough sleep—even on weekends. Create a regular sleep schedule, and stick to it.

**Exercise.** It can relieve stress and help your intestines contract regularly. If you don't feel up to a full workout, take a short walk or two during the day.

**Drink water.** It makes digestion easier, and can help prevent dehydration if you have diarrhea. If you're drinking enough, your urine will be clear to light yellow in color.

**Eat smaller, lighter meals.** Instead of eating three large meals, try eating six smaller meals throughout the day. Smaller meals can be easier to digest, which helps reduce cramping and diarrhea.

**Don't rush through your meals.** When you eat fast, you swallow more air, which can cause gas. Take your time, and set your fork down between bites.

**Watch out for trigger foods.** If certain foods make your symptoms worse, try to avoid them.

## IBS and Fiber

A high-fiber diet can help IBS symptoms. Fiber eases bouts of diarrhea and constipation by affecting the makeup of your stool, as well as how quickly you digest your food.

**Insoluble fiber** absorbs water, which can help prevent constipation. Some insoluble fibers include: vegetables such as corn and carrots, wheat bran and whole grains, nuts, and fruits like grapes.

**Soluble fibers** dissolve in water and form a gel. This gel can help prevent diarrhea by slowing down how fast food moves through your stomach. Some soluble fibers include: oats, barley, beans, peas, and fruits like apples, pears, oranges and prunes.

If you add fiber to your diet, start slowly and drink plenty of water. Ask your doctor how much fiber you need each day. If you want to take a fiber supplement, ask your doctor to recommend one that's right for you.

## Remember:

- Keep track of what foods and drinks might be triggering your IBS so you can take steps to avoid them.
- Stay hydrated, especially if you have diarrhea.
- Talk to your doctor about how much fiber, and which types, you need to eat.