

COPING WITH IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common digestive disorder and nearly one in seven people suffer from it. People with IBS have a more sensitive bowel than usual and it is more likely to be irritated by certain foods or situations. IBS does not lead to serious diseases and, although there isn't a quick fix solution or remedy, there are things that you can do to help reduce your pain or discomfort.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms will vary from person to person.

- Constipation
- Variable bowel movements with bouts of diarrhoea or constipation
- Abdominal pain
- A feeling of bloating and/or wind

Other symptoms include: Having a bowel movement and then immediately wanting to go again; feeling sick; reduced appetite; back pain; headaches; stiff or aching muscles; painful periods; feeling tired; sleeping badly; face and jaw pain.

If you often suffer from these symptoms, speak to your GP. There is no specific test for IBS so your doctor will probably examine you and do some tests to rule out other problems.

If your symptoms are accompanied by any of the following, contact your GP surgery:

- Pain that wakes you up, weight loss, fever.
- You are over 50 and have not suffered from IBS symptoms before.
- If you have blood or a tar-like substance in your bowel motions (stools) call NHS Direct on 08457 4647 (England and Wales only) or NHS24 in Scotland on 08454 24 24 24 or contact your GP surgery.

What can I do?

The best treatment for IBS is to know the things that trigger your symptoms and how to avoid them.

- Some people find their symptoms are triggered by certain foods or drinks so keeping a food diary may help you to identify what foods or drinks make your symptoms flare up.
- Some common triggers are dairy foods, bread, cereals, chocolate, caffeine or sorbitol (an artificial sweetener). Try removing these from your diet and gradually reintroducing them one by one and check your body's reaction to these foods.
- Eat a well-balanced diet with small meals at regular intervals.
- Drink plenty of water and swap herbal teas for tea and coffee.
- Avoid rich, fatty or spicy foods.
- Smoking and alcohol may make symptoms worse.

Stress

Feeling tense, angry or upset can trigger symptoms.

- Keep a diary of your symptoms and note how you feel (anxious, upset, etc.) This may help you to identify what's causing the stress and your IBS.

Your GP can suggest ways of dealing with your stress such as:

- Relaxation therapy.
- Breathing techniques, yoga, hypnotherapy, meditation.
- Talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy may help.

IBS and medicines

If you have constipation there are natural fibre supplements available from the pharmacy or on prescription which will help. Anti-spasmodic drugs can help calm stomach cramping. Ask your GP or pharmacist.

More information

The IBS Network
www.ibsnetwork.org.uk
Helpline 0114 272 3253

Digestive Disorders Foundation
www.digestivedisorders.org.uk
Helpline 020 7486 0341

International Stress Management Association
www.isma.org.uk
Tel: 07000780430