

HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter
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Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Overview

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a disorder that affects the large intestine (colon.) IBS is also known as functional gastrointestinal (GI) disorder. These disorders happen when your GI tract behaves in an abnormal way without evidence of damage due to a disease. IBS can also be known as IBS colitis, mucous colitis, spastic or nervous colon, or spastic bowel. Studies estimate that IBS affects 10 to 15 percent of U.S. adults. However, only 5 to 7 percent of U.S. adults have received a diagnosis of IBS.

Signs and Symptoms

IBS can be a chronic problem for most people. There can be times where some symptoms are worse, times where they can improve, or disappear altogether. The following signs and symptoms that can vary from person to person include:

- Abdominal pain or cramping
- A bloated feeling
- Gas
- Diarrhea or constipation-sometimes alternating bouts
- Mucous in the stool

Symptoms that may indicate a more serious condition include:

- Rectal bleeding
- Abdominal pain that progresses or occurs at night
- Weight loss

If you have any of these signs or symptoms, it is best to consult your family physician for further questions or concerns.

Risk Factors

Factors that may increase your risk of IBS include:

- **Are young.** IBS tends to occur in people under age 45.

- **Are female.** Overall, about twice as many women as men have the condition.
- **Have a family history of IBS.** Studies suggest that people who have a family member with IBS may be at increased risk of the condition.
- **Have a mental health problem.** Anxiety, depression, a personality disorder and a history of childhood sexual abuse are risk factors.

Complications

Diarrhea and constipation, both signs of irritable bowel syndrome, can aggravate hemorrhoids. In addition, if you avoid certain foods, you may not get enough of the nutrients you need, leading to malnourishment. But the condition's impact on your overall quality of life may be the most significant complication.

Diagnosis

Your doctor may recommend several tests, including stool studies to check for infection or problems with your intestine's ability to take in the nutrients from food (malabsorption). You may undergo a number of tests to rule out other causes for your symptoms such as:

- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Colonoscopy
- X-Ray
- CT scan
- Lower GI series
- Lactose Intolerance Tests
- Breath Tests
- Blood Tests
- Stool Tests

Treatment

Because it's not clear what causes irritable bowel syndrome, treatment focuses on the relief of symptoms so that you can live as normally as possible. In most cases, you can successfully control mild signs and symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome by learning to manage stress and making changes in your diet and lifestyle. Try to avoid foods that trigger your symptoms. Also try to get enough exercise, drink plenty of fluids and get enough sleep.

Dietary Changes

- **Eliminating high-gas foods.** If you have bothersome bloating or are passing considerable amounts of gas, your doctor may suggest that you cut out such items as carbonated beverages, vegetables — especially cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower — and raw fruits.
- **Eating smaller meals more often.** Large meals can cause cramping and diarrhea with IBS.
- **Add Fiber.** Fiber can make stools soft and easier to pass. Adding fiber slowly (2-3 grams a day) to let your body get used to them can prevent gas and bloating. Adults should get 22-34 grams a day.
- **Take care with dairy products.** If you're lactose intolerant, try substituting yogurt for milk. Or use an enzyme product to help break down lactose.
- **Keep a diary.** Track what you eat during the day, what symptoms occur and when.

Take these notes to your doctor to discuss special recommendations.

References

- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome/basics/definition/con-20024578>
- <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-topics/digestive-diseases/irritable-bowel-syndrome/Pages/definition-facts.aspx>

Other News:

**If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at hanrahan@astate.edu.

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or hanrahan@astate.edu. Produced by Kelsie Clark, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.