

## Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common disorder that affects the large intestine (colon). Symptoms are caused by changes in how the GI tract works. IBS is a group of symptoms that occur together, not a disease. It usually causes cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, gas, and diarrhea or constipation. IBS does not cause lasting damage to your colon. In many cases, symptoms of IBS can be controlled by managing diet, lifestyle and stress.

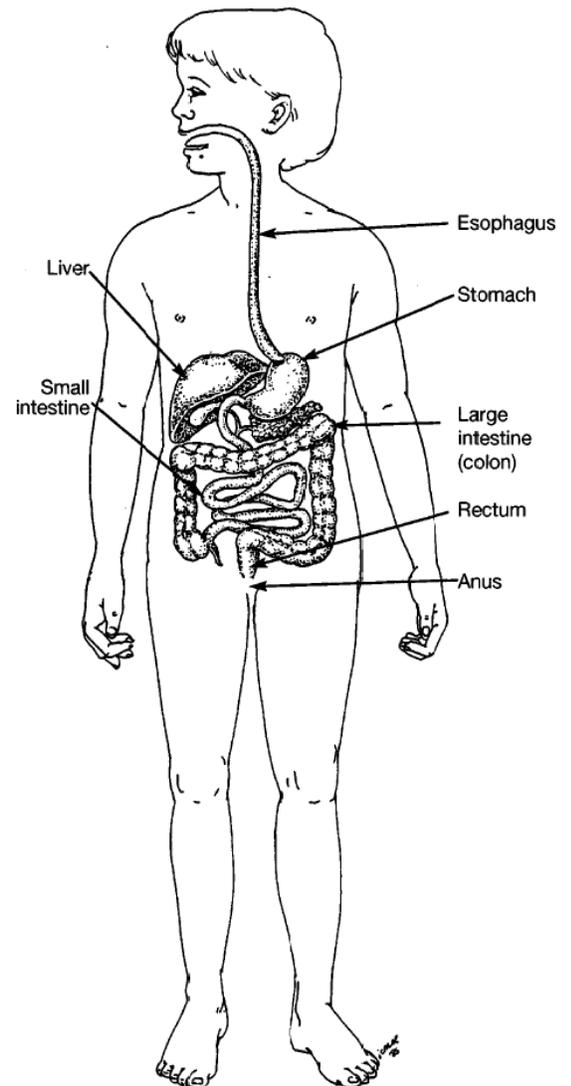
### Triggers that Affect IBS

IBS can be triggered by responses to certain foods, medicines or emotions. Many people with IBS notice symptoms after eating a particular food. Symptoms of IBS may be worse or more frequent during stressful events or changes in routine. Stress may make symptoms worse but does not cause them. Many women find that signs and symptoms are worse during or around their menstrual period.

### Symptoms of IBS

IBS symptoms vary from person to person and range from mild to severe. Most people have mild symptoms. Signs and symptoms of IBS include:

- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Constipation or diarrhea - sometimes even going back and forth between constipation and diarrhea
- Bloating (a feeling of being "gassy")
- Mucus in the stools
- Discomfort that improves after a bowel movement



**Picture 1** The gastrointestinal system inside the body.

## How IBS Is Diagnosed

First, a doctor will take a complete medical history. This will include questions about symptoms, family history of GI disorders, recent infections, medications or stressful events related to the onset of symptoms. Then the doctor will do a physical exam. IBS is often diagnosed based on symptoms. An IBS diagnosis requires that symptoms started at least 6 months ago and occurred at least 3 times a month for the past 3 months. Depending on age, symptoms and general health, some patients may require other testing or procedures to rule out the possibility of other medical conditions. The healthcare provider may perform a blood test to screen for other problems. The results of the blood test will determine if further testing is needed.

## How IBS Is Treated

Because it is not clear what causes IBS, treatment focuses on the relief of symptoms. Symptoms can be treated with a combination of:

- **Dietary changes.** No specific diet can be recommended for IBS because the condition differs from one person to another. The following changes may help:
  - Avoid food and drinks that stimulate the intestines (such as caffeine, tea, fruit juice, soda, and drinks made with sugar alcohols such as sorbitol, xylitol, and mannitol)
  - Eat smaller meals
  - Avoid foods high in fat
  - Avoid some dairy products such as “regular” milk or yogurt (choose lactose-free milk or yogurt instead)
  - Avoid food that may cause gas, such as beans and cabbage
  - Increase fiber in the diet slowly (this may improve constipation, but can sometimes make bloating worse)
  - If none of the above dietary changes improves IBS symptoms, your practitioner may recommend meeting with a Registered Dietitian to review the Low FODMAP diet.
- **Medicine** may be prescribed by the doctor to treat specific symptoms of IBS based on the severity of the symptoms. No one medicine works for everyone.
- **Regular exercise and improved sleep habits** may reduce anxiety and help relieve the bowel symptoms.
- **Psychological therapy** may help by teaching ways of coping with stress. Medicines for anxiety may also help to decrease symptoms.

## Follow-Up Appointments

Your child may have follow-up appointments with the doctor to help monitor progress.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask the doctor or nurse, or call \_\_\_\_\_.