



UNDERSTANDING IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS)

Overview

Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or IBS, is a chronic, gastrointestinal disorder. Those affected may experience recurrent abdominal pain and irregular bowel patterns that are often painful. The symptoms of IBS may last for months or years and impact the ability of those affected to work, attend school, take part in social activities or participate in sporting events.

Canada has one of the highest rates of IBS in the world. Five million Canadians suffer from IBS with 120,000 Canadians developing this digestive disorder each year. The annual economic and health care burden of IBS exceeds \$6.5 billion – this figure does not include monies spent on over-the-counter drugs or prescriptions. IBS affects significantly more women than men and is one of the most common causes for work and school absenteeism.

Symptoms

The symptoms people living with IBS experience vary from person to person. Symptoms may include abdominal pain related to their bowel movements and an irregular bowel pattern that results in constipation, diarrhea or diarrhea alternating with constipation. Other symptoms may include heartburn, nausea, bloating or abdominal pain. Those with an altered bowel pattern, often have associated gas, bloating, cramps, and mucus present around or within the stools.

Often an event can cause or bring on a change in symptoms. This could include contracting an infection while travelling, using antibiotics or new medications, changing your diet, surgery, or a stressful event. It is not uncommon for people to develop IBS after an initial infection such as food poisoning or traveler's diarrhea. The original organism is cleared but the initial insult to the system disturbs the way it functions and things may not return to normal. We call this post-infectious Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

We recognize that stress can aggravate the symptoms of IBS. Our mind and body are intimately connected and can influence one another. When stress appears to be playing a major role in the symptoms of IBS, taking action to relieve stress may help.

When should I see a doctor?

When there is a new onset or change in symptoms without an obvious precipitating factor, it is time to see the doctor. If you have a change in appetite and weight loss, rectal bleeding with dark red blood mixed in with the stool, fever, symptoms that wake you from sleep or persistent severe abdominal pain, there is a problem and you should take note of your symptoms and make an appointment to see your physician.

IBS – IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

Tests and Diagnosis

Diagnosis is based predominantly on a history identifying a group of symptoms and the exclusion of other diseases. There is no lab test, x-ray or scope that makes a positive diagnosis for irritable bowel syndrome.

Some tests allow physicians to rule out underlying problems. These tests may include air contrast barium enema, virtual colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy. A blood test can indicate low blood count which indicates anemia and may reflect bleeding or malabsorption from the gastrointestinal tract. Other blood tests may rule out other diseases like diabetes, abnormal thyroid function or changes in the calcium level that can affect the gastrointestinal tract, celiac disease and infections.

Sometimes doctors will recommend removing one food for two-weeks at a time. This is called a sequential dietary elimination trial.

Living with IBS

IBS is a benign, chronic problem that does not lead to cancer or any permanent damage to the bowel. Symptoms will however wax and wane, getting better and worse at certain times. For some individuals, symptoms do get progressively better.

You may be able to reduce your IBS symptoms with the following strategies:

- **Improve your diet** by eating a high-fibre, low-fat diet and trying the dietary elimination trials. Obesity has enhanced the severity of IBS symptoms.
- **Avoid "junk foods"**, excessive caffeine and pop.
- **When you have the urge** to have a bowel movement, follow through on this if at all possible.
- **Exercise** is a great stress reducer and promotes movement of the colon.
- **Get enough rest** – not getting enough sleep can exaggerate the symptoms of IBS.
- **Keep a diary** to help identify specific triggering dietary and emotional factors.
- **Minimize stress and tension** – both are big factors that affect IBS.

More information

For more information about protecting and enhancing your digestive health, please visit www.CDHF.ca

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- Please send me information about protecting and improving my digestive health.

Over 20 million Canadians suffer from digestive disorders every year. The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation believes this is unnecessary and unacceptable.

We reduce suffering and improve quality of life by empowering Canadians with trusted, up to date, science-based information about digestive health and disease.

As the Foundation of the Canadian Association of Gastroenterology, we work directly with leading physicians, scientists, and other health care professionals to help you understand and take control of your digestive health with confidence and optimism.

Through research and public education, we aim to:

<p>↓ REDUCE the incidence and prevalence of digestive disorders</p>	<p>↑ IMPROVE understanding of digestive health issues</p>
<p>♥ SUPPORT those suffering from digestive disorders</p>	<p>+ ENHANCE quality of life for those living with digestive disorders</p>

Request for support

The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation is a national charity governed by a volunteer board of directors. We rely on donations from the public and the generosity of our partners to develop and deliver our programs. Please consider including our Foundation as one of your chosen charities.

Contact us/Donate to

Canadian Digestive Health Foundation
1500 Upper Middle Road, Unit 3,
PO Box 76059, Oakville, ON L6M 1G0
Tel and Fax: 905-829-3949
info@CDHF.ca