

## Irritable Bowel Syndrome ~ IBS ~

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Here are some words to help you understand irritable bowel syndrome or IBS. A picture on the next page shows where these parts are in a body.

**Bowels:** The bowels are the parts of the body that digests food and fluids. Bowels are also called intestines. There is a small bowel also called the small intestine and a large bowel also called the large intestine.

**Small bowel:** the food moves from the stomach to the small bowel first. The food is broken into very small pieces and is absorbed into the blood as the muscles push it along.

**Large bowel:** the food moves through the small bowel into the large bowel. The large bowel removes water from the stool. The large bowel may also be called the colon. The large bowel has 3 parts:

- **Ascending colon:** the food comes from the small intestine and moves up this part
- **Transverse colon:** the food moves across this part
- **Descending colon:** the food moves down this part and out the rectum

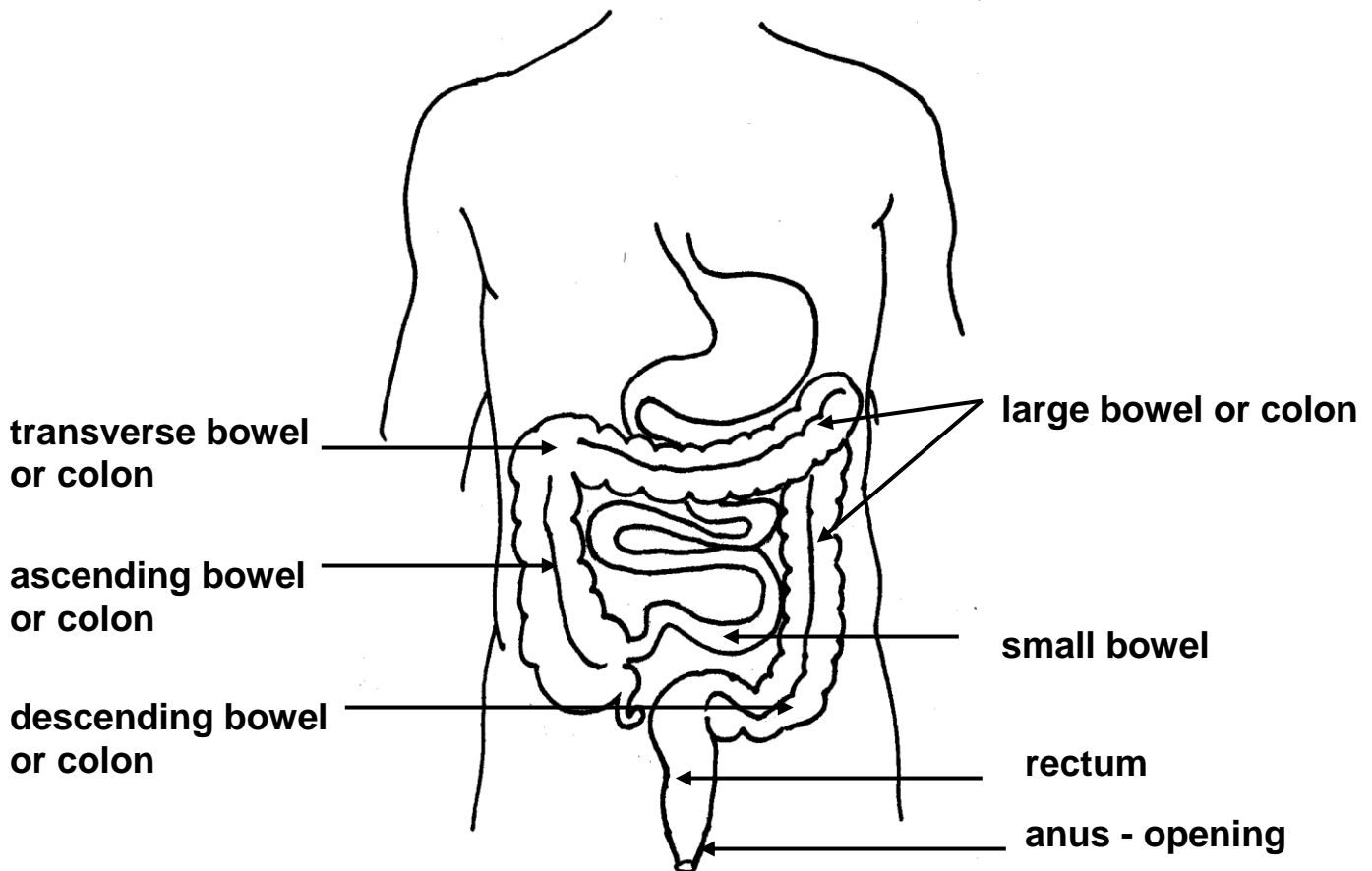
**Rectum:** is at the end of the colon and stores stool until you have a bowel movement.

**Anus:** is the opening where the stool leaves the body during a bowel movement.

### What is normal bowel function?

Normal bowel function varies from person to person. Normal bowel movements can range from 1 to 3 stools a day to 1 to 3 stools a week. Normal stool is formed and soft and passed without cramps or pain.

## Inside the body:



## What is irritable bowel syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome is a problem with normal functioning of the bowel. It is a common disorder of the intestines. It is also called IBS. The symptoms of IBS vary a lot between people.

Symptoms may include:

- abdominal cramps or pain
- bloating
- gas
- diarrhea and/or constipation
- mucous or slippery secretions in the stool

Symptoms can range from mild to severe. Some people lose weight. Some have regular pain and discomfort. IBS can cause a great deal of discomfort and distress but it is not life threatening.

At times, you may have one or more symptoms. If you suffer often from any of the symptoms listed, you may have IBS. You should make an appointment to talk to your doctor.

Symptoms of IBS can be triggered by many things:

- medications or herbal supplements
- diet
- emotions and stress
- hormones - such as during menstrual changes

## **What causes IBS?**

IBS is the most common disorder of the intestines. The cause of IBS is not known. It often appears in the late teen years or early adulthood. Researchers think that people with IBS have more sensitive nerves and muscles of the intestines but do not know why.

## **Will I have IBS forever?**

You may or may not have IBS forever. Some people with IBS get better. When life stress may be a trigger, a change in lifestyle, job or personal relationships can lead to a complete recovery. However since stress is not always a trigger, you may have to learn to live with the symptoms.

It may also help you to know that while pain and symptoms of IBS are very real, they do not cause permanent damage.

## **How is IBS diagnosed?**

Your doctor and members of the health care team will look at many things to decide if you have IBS.

Your doctor will:

- take a complete medical history
- ask you to describe all of your symptoms
- do a physical exam
- order some lab tests

You may have an x-ray of your abdomen or endoscopy. Endoscopy is a procedure where the doctor puts a thin, lighted tube into your rectum to look at the inside of your colon.

## **How is IBS treated?**

The goal of treatment is to improve your symptoms. Most people find that their symptoms can improve with some lifestyle changes and advice from members of their health care team. You may need to try a few of these things to see what works best for you.

### **Medication**

Medications may be used to help control symptoms of constipation, diarrhea and/or bloating. There is no single medication that helps IBS. When symptoms are controlled, most people have less pain. You, your doctor and pharmacist will work together to see if any medication helps.

### **Stress**

IBS is not caused by stress but for some people, stress brings on symptoms. Some people have found that when they learn to control stress, they can manage the symptoms of IBS.

Some ways to control stress are learning methods to relax such as breathing, meditation, imagery, walking, exercising and yoga. Some people find counselling or support from others helps.

### **Anorectal Biofeedback**

Biofeedback is sometimes used to help treat IBS. A small tube attached to a computer is placed into the anal canal. You can see right away how well you are using your muscles to raise or lower the pressure of the muscles in that area.

If you have diarrhea and weak muscles, you may have a problem holding onto stool and soiling your underwear. Biofeedback can help you learn to strengthen the lower muscles to gain control. At the same time, making changes in diet or medication may help to lessen diarrhea and give you more normal bowel movements.

If you have constipation and have trouble emptying the stool out biofeedback can help. You can learn to use the correct muscles to push the stool out the correct way. A small balloon is used to act like the stool in the rectum. After you have practiced using the computer, you will try to 'poop' out the balloon into the toilet.

## **Smoking**

Nicotine can make muscles in your bowels move too fast causing symptoms. If you smoke or are around second hand smoke, ask for help to stop.

## **Activity**

Staying active is important. Being active promotes regular bowel movements. Good activities are walking, swimming and biking. Activity also helps you manage stress. If you have not been active, start slowly and ask for help from your health care provider.

## **Gas and bloating**

Some people with IBS feel more discomfort when gas passes through their bowels. Reducing the amount of air you swallow may help you.

To do this:

- avoid chewing gum
- avoid using straws
- make sure dentures are secure
- get treatment for post nasal drip
- eat slowly to help decrease gas from forming
- eat small meals often
- avoid skipping meals - skipping meals leads to forming more gas

## **Diet**

Some people believe their symptoms are caused by food allergies or sensitivities. However, there are no dietary factors known to cause IBS. Still, making changes to your diet can help improve symptoms. You can ask to speak to a dietitian if you want some help with this.

Keeping track of what you eat and drink in a journal is a good way to see if any food causes your symptoms. If a specific food causes symptoms more than one time, remove it from your diet. Try including it again a few weeks later to see if symptoms return. This process can take time to figure out.

The next page shows an example of what to write in your journal.

<b>Date and Time</b>	<b>Food</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>	<b>Other factors (Stress, Activity, Feelings)</b>
Jan 1, 10:00 am	tea, honey donut	gas	stress from morning meeting

Show your journal to your health care providers so they can help you manage your IBS.

### **Helpful hints for your diet**

- Eat at least 3 meals a day at regular times during the day.
- Increase the amount of fibre in your diet. Adults should eat at least 25 to 35 grams of fibre a day. Good sources of fibre are whole grain breads and cereals, beans and lentils, fruit and vegetables. Increase the amount of fibre you have slowly to avoid discomfort in your abdomen, gas and bloating. These upsets will decrease after your body adjusts to the increased amount of fibre in your diet. When you increase your fibre, you need to drink more water and other fluids as well.
- Limit food that may increase gas. You can talk to your dietitian about this.
- Large meals can make symptoms worse, especially if they are high in fat. Limit high fat foods to help reduce pain in the abdomen and diarrhea.
- Increase fluid to 8 to 10 cups a day. Limit juice and fruit drinks to not more than 1 cup or 250 ml a day. However, if you have kidney or heart problems talk to your doctor or dietitian first.
- Reduce the amount of caffeine you have. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, colas and chocolate.
- Eat slowly, in a relaxed place. Chew food well to help digestion.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you have.

- Follow Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating. You can find a copy on the internet at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca) or ask your dietitian for a copy.
- If dairy products trigger your symptoms of gas, bloating, pain and diarrhea, you may need to reduce lactose in your diet. Talk to a dietitian.

### **Remember . . .**

Each person is different. Your symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome may not always be the same. You will need to learn what works for you. Please talk to any member of the health care team for help and support.

