

## IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS)

Little is known about the causes of IBS. While it is often exacerbated by stress and other psychological factors, it now appears that there are physiological differences in the colons of patients who have this disorder. There may be differences in the symptoms of IBS between patients. This means that of the many different treatment approaches available, you and your healthcare provider will need to select those that are most likely to help the symptoms you have.

### ***What non-drug measures can I use?***

Many people find that changing their diet is helpful. It is important to keep a dietary log to find foods that make the symptoms of IBS worse. Several common culprits are caffeine, alcohol, sorbitol (the artificial sweetener), fried or fatty foods, and gas forming foods like cabbage, broccoli, or beans.

Fiber may be helpful, especially for preventing constipation. Eating whole-grain breads and cereals, beans, fruits, and vegetables may help. In some cases, your healthcare provider may recommend a bulk-forming fiber, such as *Metamucil*.

Many patients benefit from eating smaller, more frequent meals. Large meals can cause excessive stimulation and lead to symptoms. Finally, it may be helpful to consult with a registered dietician to help you modify your diet.

While stress does not appear to cause IBS, it may make the symptoms more pronounced. Some patients have found that learning techniques to reduce stress, like relaxation therapy, and a good exercise program are helpful.

### ***Are there medications I can take?***

Over the years a number of different medications have been tried for IBS. You should always consult with your healthcare provider before trying any medication, especially nonprescription ones. Listed below are the most commonly used medications.

**Antidiarrheal agents.** Loperamide (*Imodium A-D*) can be used occasionally for diarrhea, but it doesn't help with abdominal pain and bloating.

**Antispasmodics.** Hyoscyamine (*Levsin*) and dicyclomine (*Bentyl*) can reduce pain by decreasing gastrointestinal motility. They may have some unpleasant side effects such as dry mouth, sedation, and constipation.

**Antidepressants.** Antidepressants can reduce abdominal pain as well as relieve depression and anxiety.

**Herbal products.** Several products have been tried that are available without a prescription. For example, peppermint oil is an antispasmodic that may help.

### ***Where can I go for information?***

There are some very good places on the Internet where patients with IBS can go to keep up with current information about this disorder. A listing of these sites is given for your reference. Remember, you still need to talk with your healthcare provider about any information you find. There is no control over what's put on the net!

International Foundation for Functional GI Disorders <http://www.iffgd.org>

University of North Carolina Functional GI Disorders Center <http://www.med.unc.edu/medicine/fgidc>

Irritable Bowel Syndrome Web Site <http://www.panix.com/~ibs/>

IBS Resource Center <http://www.healingwell.com/ibs/>

American Digestive Health Foundation <http://www.gastro.org/>

US Dept of Health and Human Services, NIH, American College of Physicians [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)