

Care Gram

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

What Is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a chronic condition of the digestive system. IBS can cause abnormal contractions of the colon and intestine. It contracts (spasms) in an erratic manner and can sometimes last for long periods.

What Causes IBS?

IBS tends to run in families, often begins in young adulthood, and is more common in women. Stress and anxiety may affect the intestine and worsen symptoms. Although IBS does not lead to cancer, prolonged spasms of the colon may lead to diverticulosis, a disorder in which balloon-like pockets push out from the bowel wall.

What Are the Symptoms of IBS?

Symptoms may include:

- Alternating diarrhea and constipation
- Bloating and gas
- Large amounts of mucus with bowel movements
- Stomach discomfort and cramping, often related to a bowel movement.

How Will I Know I Have IBS?

First, your doctor will complete a medical history. Certain medical tests can also help your doctor determine whether you have IBS. Tests may include:

- Blood tests
- Stool exam
- X-ray of the intestinal tract
- Sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy (a test that uses a lighted, flexible tube to inspect parts of the bowel)

What is the Treatment?

- Completing Low-FODMAP diet trial (contact Licking Memorial Gastroenterology for Care Gram, if needed)
- Increasing the amount of fiber in your diet through fruits and vegetables or fiber supplements, if constipated
- Eating smaller, more frequent meals
- Eating slowly
- Taking medication to relax the muscles in the wall of the colon
- Getting enough physical exercise – be active for 20 to 60 minutes, three to five days a week
- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Keeping a food and symptom diary to identify foods and activities that cause or improve symptoms
- Avoid foods that worsen your IBS, such as those that increase gas, including milk or ice cream (lactose)



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Treating IBS can take time. It may be necessary to try more than one combination of treatments to find the best approach to manage your symptoms.

When Should I Contact the Doctor?

Call your doctor if:

- Symptoms persist or worsen
- Your medicine does not relieve your discomfort
- You notice blood in your stool
- You are losing weight without trying