Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is an ailment of the intestines. It causes abdominal pain, cramping or bloating, and diarrhea or constipation. Although irritable bowel syndrome is a long-term problem, there are things you can do to help reduce your symptoms.

Even though the symptoms may vary from bad to good day to day, you IBS itself will not get worse over time.

What triggers IBS?
Doctors are not sure what exactly causes irritable bowel syndrome. When you have IBS, the movement in your digestive tract does not work as it should, however there are no signs of change in the intestines, such as inflammation or tumors. Doctors believe that IBS symptoms are related to problems with the signals sent between the brain and the intestines. This causes problems with the way the muscles of the intestines move.

For some, IBS may trigger pain and other symptoms from:

- stress
- certain foods
- hormonal changes
- some antibiotics

What are the symptoms to look for?
The main IBS symptoms are:

- Lower abdominal pain with constipation or diarrhea.
- Abdominal pain and mild constipation but no diarrhea
- Bloating
- Intestinal gas
- Mucus in the stools
- The feeling that you have not completely emptied your bowels
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For many suffering with IBS will go back and forth between having constipation and having diarrhea. For most people, one of these two will happen more often than the other.

IBS is quite common. Most people's symptoms are so mild that they may not ever realize they have it and have never see a doctor for treatment. But for others they may have troublesome symptoms, especially stomach cramps, bloating, and diarrhea and if persistent it should be checked out right away.

If your abdominal pain or discomfort is either continuous or comes and goes for at least 12 weeks during the past year, and two of the three following conditions occur It is a strong possibility you have IBS.

- Pain is relieved by having a bowel movement.
- The regularity of bowel movements changes.
- The appearance or form of your stool changes.

How does IBS get diagnosed?
A majority of the time, doctors can diagnose irritable bowel syndrome from the symptoms. Your doctor will ask you a series of questions about your symptoms and past health and will do a physical exam.

In some cases, you may need other tests, such as stool analysis or a sigmoidoscopy. A sigmoidoscopy lets a doctor look at the inside of the lower part of the intestine (colon). These tests can help your doctor rule out other problems that might be causing your symptoms.

How is IBS treated?
It is important to remember that IBS is a long-term condition, but there are many things you can do to help control your symptoms. Treatment usually includes:

- changes in your diet
- getting regular exercise
- managing your stress.
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If this change in diet and lifestyle changes do not help enough on their own, your doctor may prescribe medicines or natural supplements for pain, diarrhea, or constipation.

Bowel movement patterns
In IBS, your pattern of bowel movements will vary at least 25% of the time. And at any given time at least two or more of the following may happen:

Bowel movements may occur either more often (diarrhea) or less often (constipation) than usual,

- Bowel movements may differ in size or consistency
  - They may be hard and pellet like
  - Pencil-thin
  - Or loose and watery.
- You may have bloating or a feeling of gas in the intestines.
- The way stools pass changes.
- You may strain
- You may feel an urgent need to have a bowel movement
- Or feel that you haven't completely passed a stool.

Other symptoms not related to the intestinal tract.
You may sometimes have other symptoms that don’t affect the intestines, such as:

- Depression
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Anxiety
- Unpleasant taste in the mouth
- Backache
- Pain during sex or reduced sexual desire
- Heart palpitations
- Urinary problems
- frequent or urgent need to urinate
- trouble starting the urine stream
- trouble emptying the bladder
Many of these symptoms seem to often occur after a meal, during stressful times, or during menstruation.

If you are even questioning that you may have IBS contact your doctor for a consult to help get your body back to a healthy state.