



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Gastroenterology

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What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)?

IBS is a condition where the bowel does not work normally. Up to 10-20 percent of the population can be affected, although true figures are likely to be higher as many people do not seek medical advice. IBS is classed as a Gut-Brain Axis Disorder (Rome IV).

Why do these symptoms occur?

In IBS there are no changes in the body that can be seen on a scan or camera. Symptoms occur because of a change in how the muscles and nerves of the bowel are working together between the gut and the brain.

It is thought that the gut becomes sensitive and over-reacts to the process of digestion, causing changes to the speed and strength of muscle movement, altering bowel habit, causing pain and other symptoms.

Diagnosis

A diagnosis may be given if symptoms of abdominal pain are related to:

- Defecation (opening your bowels), and/or:
- associated with altered stool frequency (increased or decreased), and/or
- associated with altered stool form or appearance (hard, lumpy, loose, or watery); and there are at least two of the following:
 - Altered stool passage (straining, urgency, or incomplete evacuation).
 - Abdominal bloating (more common in women than men), distension, or hardness.
 - Symptoms worsened by eating.
 - Passage of rectal mucus, and alternative conditions with similar symptoms have been excluded.

Although the cause of the condition is not fully understood, we know that it can be triggered by a number of circumstances such as:

- Bowel infections such as gastroenteritis, traveller's diarrhoea, or food poisoning.
- An abdominal procedure or operation.
- Antibiotics affecting the bowel's natural balance of bacteria, known as the gut microbiome.
- Stress and anxiety including positive stress such as preparing for a wedding or planning a holiday.
- Significant life events, that involve loss and separation, e.g. divorce, bereavement, moving home or job change etc.
- Irregular or poor diet.
- Hormonal changes. In women these may be linked to the menstrual cycle.
- History of abuse.

It is also possible there may be no apparent reason or pattern for your symptoms which can be difficult to treat and frustrating for you.

Symptoms

These can vary from person to person, and can range from being very mild to severe and intermittent to constant. Symptoms can often fluctuate depending on your life circumstances and are often worse around the time of menstruation and at times of stress.

- Abdominal pain or cramps
- Diarrhoea or constipation or both
- Urgent need to open bowels
- A feeling that you haven't fully emptied the bowel
- Passing mucus or slime with stool
- Bloating and distension of abdomen
- Flatulence
- Noisy gurgling of bowel
- Incontinence

Many people may experience some short-term similar symptoms at some point in their lives which resolve quickly, but this does not indicate IBS.

Other gut disorders

People can experience symptoms and sensitivity along the whole of the digestive system, from the oesophagus to the anus. This may be part of IBS or diagnosed as another functional disorder such as Dyspepsia or Non-Cardiac Chest Pain.

Symptoms include:

- Heartburn
- Nausea
- Frequent and excessive belching
- Feeling full quickly when eating
- Chest discomfort
- Lump in the throat or difficulty swallowing
- Back pain
- Pain during sexual intercourse in women (dyspareunia)
- Fatigue
- Frequency of urine

If you experience bleeding from your rectum, unexpected weight loss or a sudden change in bowel habit, you must report this to your doctor.

It is important to remember that IBS:-

- Is a very real physical condition and is taken seriously
- Is not life threatening
- Will not change into any other condition or disease
- Does not make you more likely to develop any other bowel condition
- Is not contagious

Managing your symptoms

There are many things that you can do to improve your health and reduce your symptoms. Effective treatment can vary from one person to another and depends on your particular symptoms.

Rather than having one solution, often it involves making a number of changes gradually. Working to promote your health and wellbeing is important in managing this condition.

Any treatment **needs your commitment to work**, and it is important that you understand what you can do to manage your symptoms now and in the future.

Diet

Diet is often the first thing to look at when trying to manage IBS.

What you eat, and the way in which you eat it, affects your digestion and can cause unpleasant symptoms.

The following advice may help things improve.

Eating habits

- Eat three regular meals per day (plus snacks if needed)
- Don't miss meals or have long periods without eating
- Eat no more than three portions of fruit a day (80 grams)
- Eat small portions
- Try to avoid eating late at night
- Take your time at meal times and don't rush meals
- Sit down and chew your food well
- Avoid or reduce processed foods

Fluids

- Try to drink plenty of fluid spread out over the day
- Aim for eight to ten cups or one and a half to three litres of fluid per day
- Water and dilute squash are the best types of drinks to have. Fruit/herbal tea particularly peppermint may be helpful
- Try to avoid drinking alcohol every day and have no more than two units a day

For symptoms of wind and bloating

- Try to limit fizzy drinks (including fizzy water and fizzy alcoholic drinks)

For symptoms of diarrhoea or loose stools

- Limit pure fruit juice to one small glass per day
- Limit caffeinated drinks to three cups per day e.g. tea, coffee, stimulant/energy drinks, cola
- Limit foods that are high in fat
- Spicy foods may worsen symptoms
- Limit intake of **sugar free** sweets or drinks such as mints, chewing gum soft drinks containing the artificial sweetener sorbitol

Healthy eating

- You should aim to eat a varied and balanced diet
- Try to avoid over restricting foods in your diet

Changing your diet can be challenging and complex. It is important to ensure you are following these basic guidelines before excluding certain food types.

Often patients restrict themselves so much that their diet is lacking essential nutrients, without any real improvement in their symptoms.

Clearly if certain foods **always** upset you, these are best avoided.

If you would like advice and support in making changes to your diet, ask your doctor about seeing a dietitian.

Other options

The following gives an overview of other treatment options that may help you to manage your symptoms and feel more in control of your condition.

If you require further advice, please ask:

- Your doctor or nurse
- See the useful contacts page at the end of this booklet.

Medication

Speak to your nurse or doctor for advice for your specific symptoms.

Commonly used are:

- Anti diarrhoea e.g. Loperamide
- Anti spasm e.g. Peppermint oil, Mebeverine, Buscopan
- Bulking agents e.g. Psyllium, Fybogel, Ispaghula husk, Linseeds
- Laxatives e.g. Movicol
- Bowel relaxing/pain relief - anti-depressants e.g. low dose Amitriptyline

Exercise

Keep active every day and include regular cardiovascular exercise such as brisk walking, swimming, cycling etc. Exercise can be beneficial for constipation. Excessive exercise can cause problems for some people, so this may be modified for each individual.

Guided relaxation

In the form of CDs or classes can reduce stress and promote health. This can help calm down the gut.

Reduce stress

This can help to calm the sensitivity of the gut and reduce symptoms. Find a balance between work and rest, take time for yourself and learn how to say no when you feel overloaded.

Hypnotherapy

This can reduce symptoms, help you feel more in control and reduce stress and anxiety. Gut directed hypnotherapy has been well researched and shown to reduce symptoms in 70 percent of IBS patients.

Hypnotherapy is recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) for patients whose symptoms have not responded to other treatment. We have a leaflet that explains this in more detail.

Psychological therapy

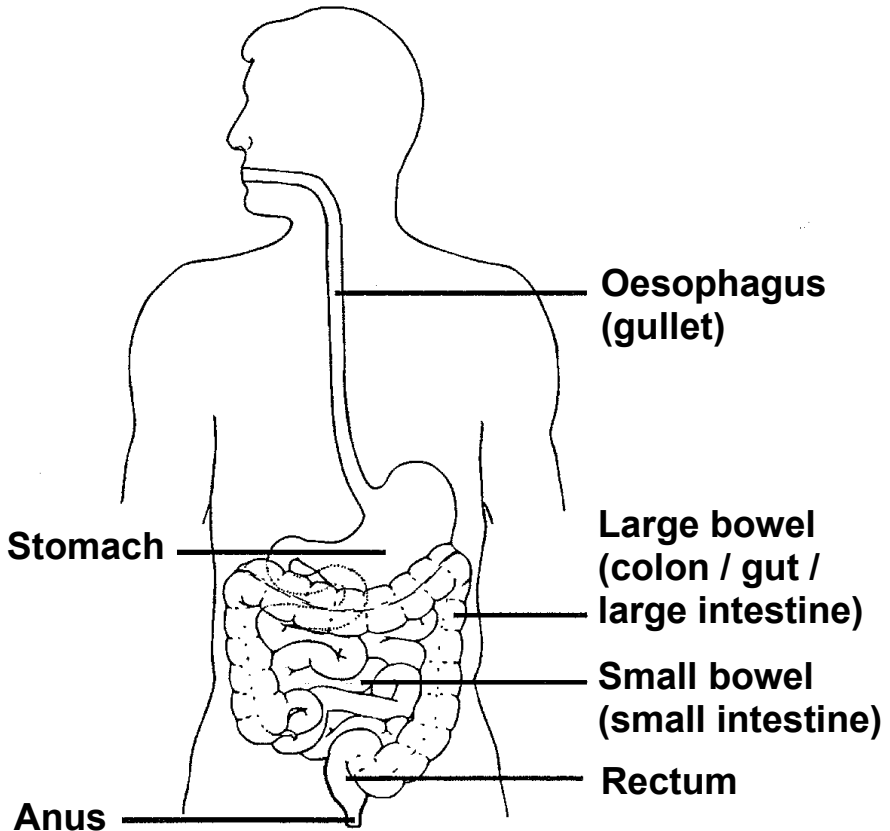
If panic about symptoms or worry about your health is restricting your life, ask the nurse or doctor about seeing a psychologist. Psychological therapy helps you to cope better in situations that you find difficult. Anxiety and panic can bring on or worsen IBS symptoms, therefore feeling more relaxed and in control will help reduce symptoms.

Supplements

Depending on your symptoms, food supplements such as soluble fibre (linseeds, psyllium) peppermint oil or probiotics may help. Take advice from your doctor, nurse or dietitian. Some patients report benefit from taking Aloe Vera and herbal preparations.

How does the gut (Gastrointestinal Tract) normally work?

The gut is one continuous muscle tube from top to bottom which moves food and waste along its length in a wave type motion (peristalsis). It includes the mouth, oesophagus (gullet), stomach, small intestine (small bowel), large intestine (colon or large bowel), rectum and anus (see illustration).



The purpose of the gut is to digest food and fluid, allow absorption of nutrients into the blood and to dispose of waste matter. Food moving through the gut is broken down by chewing and by the stomach mixing the food and producing acid. The liquid contents then move into the small intestine where the nutrients are absorbed into the body. What's left is waste or stool that is full of water, and during its journey through the colon, most of the water is absorbed back into the body. It gradually becomes more solid and is passed out of the body as faeces (stool).

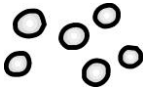






It is quite normal to belch, pass wind and to hear and feel gurgling of the bowel.

Digestion normally works in a steady and co-ordinated way but what seems like a simple straightforward process, is actually very complex.

If movement through the colon is more rapid than normal, there is less time for water to be absorbed, so the stool can be very soft or liquid. If the movement is too slow, too much water gets absorbed and the stool become harder and more difficult to pass. This partly explains what happens when someone has diarrhoea or constipation.

Bristol Stool Chart

The Bristol Stool Chart is often used to determine the consistency of stool, and generally speaking, types three and four are considered to be a normal stool.

Type 1		Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
Type 2		Sausage-shaped but lumpy
Type 3		Like a sausage but with cracks on the surface
Type 4		Like a sausage or snake, smooth and soft
Type 5		Soft blobs with clear-cut edges
Type 6		Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, a mushy stool
Type 7		Watery, no solid pieces. Entirely Liquid

The gut brain axis

The gut has its own nervous system which co-ordinates the many processes of digestion. Often the gut deals with digestion without needing the brain so you are unaware of what is happening.

Messages are only sent from the gut to the brain to make you aware of certain things:-

- Hunger
- The degree of fullness of the stomach
- Gurgling noises
- The need to open the bowels or pass wind
- When we are nervous with a feeling of “butterflies”
- Discomfort or pain

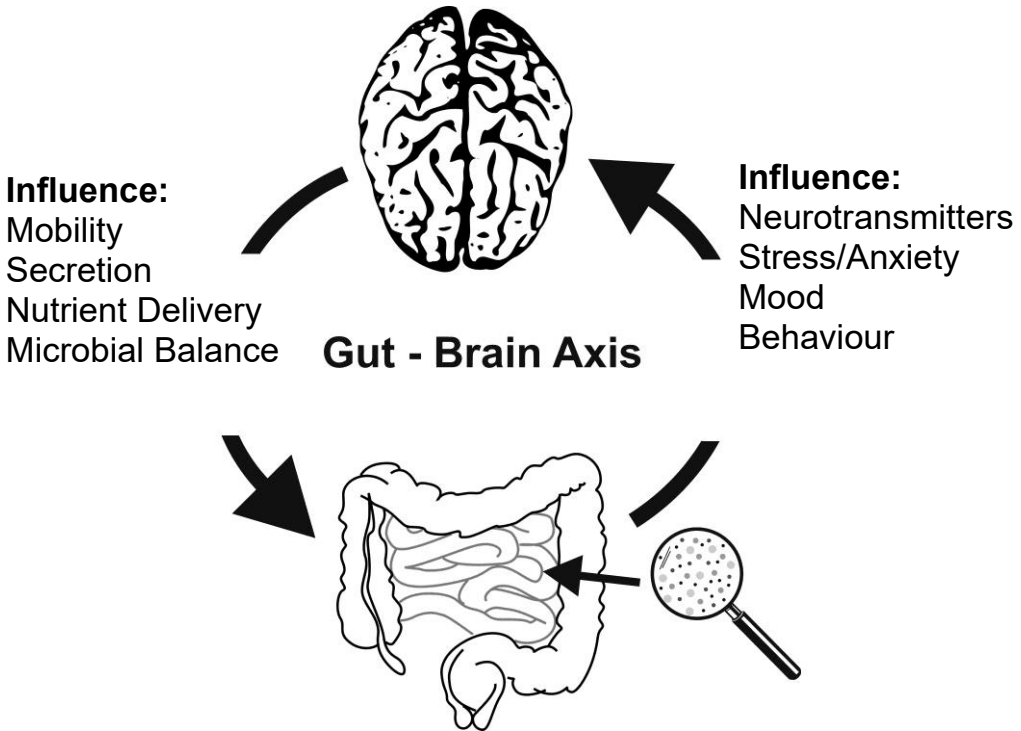
Likewise the brain sends message to the gut reflecting your mood and stress levels.

The **gut-brain axis** (GBA) is a bidirectional link between the central nervous system (CNS) and the enteric nervous system (ENS – the gut) of the body.

The gut has many nerves that transmit sensations to the brain of anxiety/stress, mood, and behaviour.

Microbes in the gut can also have an effect on these signals. For example, some microbes can affect the production of Serotonin; this compound is thought to help regulate mood and stress levels.

The brain can then signal to the gut how fast it works, what is secreted into the gut, nutrients being used and the balance of microbes in the gut.



What about stress?

The stress response is our body's way of helping us to cope in life, it is known as the fight or flight response.

When we are stressed no matter what the cause, such as a physical threat, being busy at work or home, an exam, or a holiday, **our body reacts in the same way.**

Adrenaline and other stress hormones are released causing a number of physical changes in the body getting us ready for action. The heart rate and breathing increases and blood is diverted to the muscles, and away from the gut, interfering with digestion and causing sensations like nausea and butterflies.

The right amount of stress is good. It helps us to do our best work and keeps us alert, energetic, focused, and engaged in the world around us. Too much stress, on the other hand, can lead to many problems such as:-

- Feeling tense and unable to relax or switch off
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Poor concentration and forgetfulness
- Reduced sex drive
- Low mood or depression
- Fatigue
- Sleeping problems
- Health problems e.g. headaches, bowel problems, infections etc.
- Stress can also make existing IBS conditions worse.

Stress and IBS

If you already have a sensitive bowel as in IBS, then worry over your symptoms or stress for any reason can make symptoms worse. It can also increase the amount of pain you feel. It is important that you try to reduce the amount of stress you are under and try to achieve a balance between work and play. There are a number of measures you can take to help reduce stress:-

- ✓ Make lists to help you prioritise responsibilities
- ✓ Realise you can only do one thing at a time
- ✓ You don't need to do everything. Can you delegate?
- ✓ Keep a note pad and pen by your bed to offload your thoughts or tasks for the next day before sleeping
- ✓ Take regular breaks in the day
- ✓ Exercise regularly
- ✓ Take up a hobby
- ✓ Try relaxation techniques, meditation, yoga etc.
- ✓ Hypnotherapy
- ✓ Find time for yourself and make it a priority
- ✓ Listen to what your body is telling you and make the right changes for you

Further information and useful contacts

[All websites checked July 2020]

Bladder and Bowel Foundation

Helpline: 0845 345 0165

www.bladderandbowelfoundation.org

email: info@bladderandbowelfoundation.org

Continence Foundation

www.continence-foundation.org.uk

email: info@continence-foundation.org.uk

International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders

www.iffgd.org/lower-gi-disorders/irritable-bowel-syndrome.html

The IBS Network, Unit 1.12 SOAR Works

14 Knutton Road, Sheffield, S5 9NU

Telephone helpline: 0872 300 4537

www.theibsnetwork.org

e-mail enquiries to: info@theibsnetwork.org

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

www.nice.org.uk

NHS Website

www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/

South Manchester Functional Bowel Service

www.ibs-care.org

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

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Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

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或發電

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