What is irritable bowel syndrome?
Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) refers to a complex disorder of the upper and lower intestinal tract. It is mainly characterized by a pattern of symptoms often worsened by emotional stress. The condition involves hypersensitivity to pain in the abdomen combined with altered bowel habits resulting in diarrhea, constipation or both. IBS cannot be cured but it can be controlled.

Causes and risk factors
IBS is characterized by a combination of abdominal pain and altered bowel function. There are many possible causes. For instance, there may be a disturbance in the muscle movement of the intestine or a lower tolerance for stretching and movement of the intestine. There is no abnormality in the structure of the intestine.

IBS can occur at any age, but often begins in adolescence or early adulthood. It is more common in women. Predisposing factors may include a low-fiber diet, emotional stress or anxiety, use of laxatives, a bout of infectious diarrhea or other temporary bowel inflammation.

Alcohol, caffeine, stress and emotional upsets have been known to worsen symptoms of IBS.

Signs and symptoms
The signs and symptoms of IBS may come and go

- Abdominal bloating and gas
- Lower abdominal pain and cramps that may be worse after eating and better or gone after a bowel movement
- Chronic and frequent diarrhea or constipation or both

- Abdominal fullness, gas and bloating
- Abdominal swelling

Care and treatment
Your healthcare provider may suggest one or more of the following tests or treatments.

- Tests – Your Caregiver will ask questions about your health history and do a physical examination. Some tests help the doctor find out what is causing IBS, others help plan treatment. Ask your doctor for more information about these tests.

- Abdominal X-rays – Abdominal X-rays are pictures of the organs inside your abdomen. Doctors use these pictures to look for problems such as blocked intestines, kidney stones or some ulcers.

- Upper and/or lower endoscopy – A thin adjustable instrument with a camera attached at the end is inserted into the patient's mouth or rectum. This instrument allows the physician to look for problems inside your stomach, esophagus, colon, and rectum.

- Blood tests – Tests tell about your health condition. Blood may be taken from a vein in your hand, arm or the bend in your elbow.

- Sigmoidoscopy (sig-moid-oss-kuh-p) – This test looks at parts of your intestine, the sigmoid and the rectum, using a scope with a magnifying glass that is guided into the bowel to determine the source of illness.

- Diet – Keep stool moving through your bowel by eating foods containing fiber.
• **Stool sample** - A sample may show whether germs are causing the illness. This helps determine what medicine may be most effective for treatment.

• **Medicine** - Most people are treated with medicine to help control the abdominal cramping. You may be given medicine to treat depression, help you relax or to decrease diarrhea or constipation.

• **Stress** - Try to decrease stress in your life. Stop smoking and start exercising.

**Quick Facts About IBS**

- One in five Americans has IBS, making it one of the most common disorders diagnosed by doctors.

- IBS occurs more often in women than men, usually beginning around age 20.

- People with IBS have colons that are more sensitive and react to things such as stress, large meals, gas, medicine, certain foods, caffeine or alcohol.

- IBS does not harm the intestines and does not lead to cancer. It is not related to Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis.

**TO FIND OUT MORE**

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