

Patient information

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What is it?

Irritable bowel is a collection of symptoms which probably represent a mixture of conditions which have different causes. Some patients find they are intolerant of certain foods such as milk or wheat; other patients may be swallowing air excessively. Some patients have it through insufficient dietary fibre. Stress and anxiety may also be a contributing factor rather than the cause.

What are the symptoms?

- Bloating
- Cramp like abdominal pain – particularly on the left side
- Irregular bowel action – sometimes diarrhoea, sometimes constipation
- You may pass mucus either with stool (motions) or on its own
- Very occasionally loss of appetite and nausea (feeling sick) may occur

These symptoms can come and go. You may experience all of them or just one or two. They may only last for a few days but occasionally can go on for weeks and months.

Please note: Passing blood is **NOT** a symptom of IBS. If this should occur then consult your doctor.

What is the treatment?

There is no cure for IBS, only measures to help your symptoms.

The treatment depends on the cause.

Although easier said than done, try and relax more. There are some very useful books and tapes available in libraries and book shops.

Increase the amount of fibre in your diet, for example: cereals, e.g. All Bran®, Bran Flakes®, Weetabix®, muesli, fruit and vegetables and brown bread.

You must however drink plenty of water: 1-1½ litres a day.

Eat your meals slowly and chew food thoroughly.

Try and take some exercise.

Occasionally you may need to take tablets to reduce the spasm, e.g. Colpermin or Colofac. Your doctor will advise you.

You may also need extra fibre in the form of granules eg Fybogel.

You may need to eliminate wheat and dairy products from your diet.

Should you require any further advice, then you may contact:

IBS Support Group and several useful books on IBS.

IBS Network
Northern General Hospital
Sheffield S5 7AU

(send a £1 coin and a stamped addressed envelope).