

Well Being Institute of Australia
“Put the bounce back into your life!”
1 Ward Street
Ashburton 3147
Phone 03 9885 7766

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) Definition

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a functional bowel disorder characterised by abdominal pain and changes in bowel habits which are *not* associated with any abnormalities seen on routine clinical testing. IBS is usually described in a patient as either:

- IBS-D: diarrhoea-predominant
- IBS-C: constipation-predominant
- IBS-A: alternating stool pattern

IBS often starts in young adulthood and accounts for half of all gastrointestinal referrals. The syndrome is a major cause of lost work or school time and affects twice as many women as men. IBS diagnosis requires at least 12 weeks in the preceding 12 months, of abdominal discomfort or pain that was relieved with defaecation; and/or was associated with a change in frequency of stool; and/or was associated with a change in form (appearance) of stool.

IBS symptoms result from abnormal motility, with peristaltic contractions becoming disorganised, harsh and/or spasmodic. The erratic propulsion that results can cause sudden, explosive elimination of stools, or can delay any elimination. Chronic stress or depression can trigger attacks. Eating in general can cause immediate need for a bowel movement. Specific foods such as high-fat meals, wheat, dairy products, and citrus fruits, as well as drinks containing caffeine or alcohol, can aggravate the condition.

Some Causes of IBS

Major causative factors and risk factors that can contribute to the incidence of IBS include

- Stress
- Depression
- In some cases, eating specific foods, including wheat, dairy products, or citrus fruits
- In some cases, alcohol or caffeine
- Familial predisposition
- Certain drugs (e.g., NSAID's) can aggravate the bowel's tendency to contract abnormally.
- Hormones – menstruation frequently triggers or exacerbates IBS symptoms, while pregnancy and menopause improve symptoms. Hormone replacement therapy is associated with an increased risk of developing IBS.

Symptoms & Signs of IBS

Common signs and symptoms of IBS include the following:

- Abnormal stool frequency (“abnormal” may be defined as greater than 3 bowel movements per day and less than 3 bowel movements per week)
- Abnormal stool form (lumpy/hard or loose/watery stool)
- Abnormal stool passage (straining, urgency, or feeling of incomplete evacuation)
- Passage of mucous
- Bloating or feeling of abdominal distension.
- Straining during a bowel movement
- Urgency (having to rush to have a bowel movement)
- Feeling of incomplete bowel movement
- Abdominal pain and/or discomfort relieved by defaecating
- Changes in bowel habits
- Diarrhoea or constipation, or both alternately
- Need for bowel movement immediately on waking or after eating

Conventional Pathology Tests For IBS

TEST INTERPRETATION GUIDELINES

Endoscopy An endoscope is a medical device consisting of a camera mounted on a flexible tube. Small instruments can be used to take samples of suspicious tissues through the endoscope. In lower GI endoscopy, this device is inserted through the anus to visually analyse the colon.

Barium enema Barium sulphate, a chalky substance, is used to partially fill and open up the colon. When the colon is about half-full of barium, air is inserted to cause the colon to expand. X-rays can show diverticula, fistulae, abscesses.

Ultrasound Abdominal ultrasound performed diagnostically may reveal inflammation, diverticula, and abscesses.

Erythrocyte

Sedimentation Rate

Elevated ESR is considered indicative of inflammatory disease.

Normal Values: 3-12mm/hr

Pharmaceutical Treatments For IBS

- **Anti-spasmodic agents:** drugs such as hyoscyamine (Donnatab), mebeverine (Colofac) or hyoscine (Buscopan) can reduce the pain of spasm.
- **Anti-diarrhoeal drugs:** patients with diarrhoea may take loperamide (Imodium) or diphenoxylate (Lomotil) before meals, as needed.
- **Laxatives:** important in constipation-predominant IBS.
- **Anti-depressants:** due to strong correlation between IBS and anxiety, depression and mood disorders, low dosage of tricyclic and SSRI antidepressants have shown to be the most widely prescribed medications for helping to relieve symptoms of visceral sensitivity and diarrhoea or constipation. E.g., oral doses of amitriptyline, taken 30 to 60 minutes before meals, may reduce bowel spasms.

Diet and Lifestyle Advice For IBS.

Dietary and lifestyle guidelines may assist in the management of IBS:

- Stress reduction techniques through biofeedback, hypnosis, or counselling can help patients to deal with stress.
- Electric heating pads, hot water bottles, and long hot baths can relieve painful spasms and cramping in the abdomen.
- Regular exercise, such as walking, can reduce stress, and encourages bowel movements in constipated individuals.
- Castor oil pack: Used externally, castor oil is a powerful anti-inflammatory. Apply oil directly to skin, cover with a clean soft cloth and plastic wrap. Place a heat source (hot water bottle or heating pad) over the pack and let sit for 30 to 60 minutes. For best results, use for three consecutive days.
- Abdominal breathing helps to induce the relaxation response and may aid normal physiological functioning.
- Removal of known food allergens or food irritants is imperative. The most common food allergens are dairy, wheat, corn, peanuts, citrus, soy, eggs, fish, and tomatoes.
- An elimination/challenge trial may be helpful in uncovering sensitivities. Remove all suspected allergens from the diet for two weeks. Add in one food every three days and wait for reaction which may include digestive upset, headache, fatigue, flushing, or worsening of symptoms.
- Fibre supplementation helps reduce abdominal pain, cramping, and gas.
- Foods and beverages to be avoided or minimised include red meat, fried products, dairy, chocolate, coffee, alcohol, carbonated beverages and artificial sweeteners.

Supportive Natural Therapies For IBS.

Integrated Detoxification may assist in correcting gut flora, correcting digestion, repairing gut permeability and improving liver detoxification of toxins.

Nutritional and herbal supplements are prescribed according to your individual needs and may include:

Glutamine, an amino acid which is essential for the repair of the gut lining.

Digestive enzymes to help with digestion.

Herbs such as aloe vera, tumeric and deglycyrrhizinised licorice to reduce inflammation.

Zinc which is a critical nutrient for gut healing.

Lactobacillus plantarum 299v a "good" bacteria which is proven to assist in reducing IBS pain and symptoms.

Dr Peter Holsman.