

# IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS) (SPASTIC COLON; COLITIS)

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

### DESCRIPTION

An irritative and inflammatory disorder of the intestine. It is not contagious, inherited or cancerous. It is twice as likely to affect women as men.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The following symptoms usually begin in early adult life and episodes may last for days, weeks, or months.

- Cramp-like pain in the middle or to one side of the lower abdomen. Pain is usually relieved with bowel movements.
- Abdominal bloating and gas
- Mucous in stools
- Diarrhea or constipation, usually alternating
- Urgency to have bowel movement
- More likely to occur when under stress

### CAUSES

Unknown. May be related to stress and emotional conflict that results in anxiety or depression. Situations that often precede an attack include obsessive worry about everyday problems; marital tension; fear of loss of a beloved person or object; death of a loved one; or final examinations. Symptoms may also be triggered by eating, though no specific food has been identified as responsible.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Stress
- Improper diet
- Smoking
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Under age 35
- Other family members with similar bowel problems.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Reduce stress or try to modify your response to it and pay attention to good dietary habits.

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

The condition is usually recurrent throughout life. Symptoms decrease or may disappear for periods of time. It is not life-threatening and doesn't progress to cancer or inflammatory disease.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

May limit physical activities and interfere with daily schedule

### GENERAL MEASURES

Diagnostic tests may include laboratory studies, including stool studies, to exclude other disorders. Reduce stress in your life. Try various techniques that can help you relax (meditation, self-hypnosis, or biofeedback). Keep a stress diary so you know who or what may bring on symptoms. Medication may help, but it will not cure this disorder. Quit smoking, nicotine may contribute to the problem. Obtain counseling for emotional support and to learn stress management techniques.

### MEDICATION

- Antispasmodics to relieve severe cramps and drugs to treat the constipation form of IBS may be prescribed.
- Drugs for depression or anxiety may be prescribed.
- Antidiarrheals or laxatives need to be used with caution. Get medical advice before using them.

### ACTIVITY & DIET

No restrictions. Good physical fitness improves bowel function and helps reduce stress. Increase fiber in the diet to promote good bowel function. Add fiber to your diet slowly to give the body time to adjust. Don't eat foods or drinks that aggravate symptoms. Coffee, chocolate, corn, or milk may be a major cause of symptoms in some people. Keep a food diary so you can find out which foods aggravate symptoms. Avoid gas-producing and spicy foods. Avoid large meals but eat regularly. Limit alcohol consumption.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Fever develops.
- Stool is black or tarry-looking.
- Vomiting occurs.
- Unexplained weight loss of 5 pounds or more occurs.
- Symptoms don't improve despite treatment.

Student Health Center

[WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC](http://WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC)

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.



618-453-3311

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