

HEALTH TOPICS

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

Overview

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common condition that affects the intestinal tract and leads to abnormal intestinal contractions.
- The cause of IBS is not known though there is evidence that it could be due to abnormal intestinal motility, and increased sensitivity of the intestinal nervous system.
- Some individuals develop IBS after an episode of an intestinal bacterial infection (gastroenteritis) and it is theorized that this leads to changes in one's immune system that affects gut motility and gut sensitivity. It is not contagious, or cancerous.
- IBS usually begins in the late teens or early 20's. It affects woman more frequently than men with a 2:1 ratio.

Signs & Symptoms

Symptoms vary in affected individuals and are frequently relieved by bowel movements.

Symptoms can include:

- Change in frequency and/or consistency of bowel movements
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Abdominal bloating
- Feeling of incomplete bowel movements
- Mucous in stools
- Depression and anxiety

IBS is diagnosed by taking a careful medical history, examination and labwork to exclude other medical conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease, gluten sensitivity, lactose intolerance, and intestinal infections.

Prevention

- There is no specific prevention but some foods may make IBS worse such as fatty foods, milk products, chocolate, alcohol, caffeine, and carbonated drinks.
- For constipation, eating high fiber foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains may reduce symptoms.
- Lactose intolerance, and intolerance to fructose and sorbitol should be excluded.
- Avoid high gas producing foods such as cabbage, cauliflower, raw onions, garlic, brown beans, and brussel sprouts.

Treatment

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There is no cure for IBS. Most people with IBS are treated by dietary advice and education of the condition. Some individuals can benefit from medications that include:

- Antispasmodics - for pain and diarrhea
- Antidiarrheal - such as over the counter loperamide to reduce frequency of loose stools.
- Fiber - to improve diarrhea or constipation
- Laxatives - for constipation
- Antidepressants - for severe pain, anxiety or depression

How We Can Help

- If you would like to be seen by our medical staff, you can book an appointment [online](#) or by calling our Appointment Desk to [schedule an appointment](#).
- Also, our [Advice Nurse](#) service is free for all UCSB students to discuss health concerns and the options for medical care.
- [Over the counter \(OTC\) products](#) to help manage the IBS symptoms are available for purchase at our Pharmacy, which is located in the lobby of UCSB Student Health Service.

Recommended Resources

- **Irritable Bowel Syndrome** (Mayo Clinic) <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome/basics/definition/CON-20024578>
- **Irritable Bowel Syndrome (WebMD)** <http://www.webmd.com/ibs/>
- **IBS: A Patient's Guide To Living with Irritable Bowel Syndrome** (American Gastroenterological Association) <http://www.gastro.org/patient-center/digestive-conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome>