

# Feeling Irritable? It Could Be a Gut Feeling.



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One common gastrointestinal disorder in Americans is something called Irritable Bowel Syndrome – often called IBS, or spastic colon. More than 200,000 adults in the United States are diagnosed with IBS each year and suffer through the challenges, pain, and often confusing or seemingly random cluster of symptoms. When it comes to IBS, there is no associated mechanical, biochemical, or inflammatory condition, and the disorder is more common in women than in men. Treatment can help, but the condition cannot be cured – and IBS can last for years or be a lifelong concern.

### ***But what are those symptoms, and how do you know when to see a doctor?***

First of all, it's important to know that only a physician can make the medical diagnosis for IBS and map out possible treatment options. The symptoms patients experience are highly predictive of the syndrome, and they include altered bowel habit as well as abdominal pain and/or discomfort. The abdominal pain and discomfort experienced by patients with irritable bowel syndrome are often the leading symptoms that prompt them to seek out help from their primary care physician, who will refer them to a gastrointestinal specialist to rule out other concerns. The gastrointestinal symptoms that present in a patient

with IBS are a change in bowel habits, constipation, diarrhea, or alternating diarrhea and constipation. Additionally, patients can experience inability to empty bowels, indigestion, nausea, passing excessive amounts of gas, or an urgent need for a bowel movement. The abdominal pain can be recurrent, with cramping or discomfort.

IBS affects ongoing quality of life for many patients. Part of this is its association with bloating, discomfort, and an altered body image. Quality of life reports from patients with irritable bowel syndrome who seek medical care are significantly altered compared to the general population. Patients can experience loss of appetite, anxiety or depression, and general discomfort. Overall, patients seen in physician clinics may have a high frequency of psychosocial stress or dysfunction associated with the condition, so it's very important to seek care.

### ***Interesting Facts and Potential Treatments:***

- The age of onset of IBS seems to increase during adolescence and peaks in the 3rd or 4th decades of life.
- The exact cause of irritable bowel syndrome is unknown, although altered

gastrointestinal motility and increased gut sensitivity are common.

- There are many therapies that can be tried, including medications as well as non-pharmacologic therapies.
- Identification of psychosocial stressors that either trigger or maintain symptoms may and should lead to alleviation of symptoms through lifestyle modification.
- Dietary changes such as a high fiber diet or supplementation with dietary fiber are frequently utilized.
- Self-care such as physical exercise, stress management and relaxation techniques can help patients.
- Several classes of drugs can be very helpful including antibiotics, antispasmodics, antidiarrheal or nerve pain medication.
- Some people can control their symptoms by managing diet, lifestyle, and stress – while others will need medication and counseling.

Contact your primary care physician if you are experiencing any of these symptoms, especially to rule out other possible gastrointestinal diseases. Your "gut feeling" may be prompting you to get help!

***For more information or to schedule an appointment please call 605-665-1722.***