

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common disorder that affects the digestive system. It is a condition characterized by abdominal pain, bloating, changes in bowel habits, and discomfort.

What causes irritable bowel syndrome?

While the exact cause of IBS is not known however, it is believed to involve a combination of factors such as abnormal muscle contractions in the intestine, intestinal inflammation, and changes in the gut microbiota. IBS is a type of disorder of the gut-brain interaction, have to do with problems in how your gut and brain work together.

What are the Symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Symptoms of IBS can vary from person to person, but they often include:

Abdominal pain or cramping: This is typically relieved after a bowel movement.

Bloating and gas: Many people with IBS experience increased gas production and a feeling of bloating in the abdomen.

Diarrhoea: Some individuals with IBS have frequent loose stools or diarrhoea.

Constipation: Others may experience infrequent bowel movements or have stools that are hard and difficult to pass.

Alternating bowel habits: Some people with IBS may experience both diarrhoea and constipation, with periods of normal bowel movements in between.

Mucus in the stool: It is not uncommon for individuals with IBS to notice mucus in their stools.

Urgency: There may be a sudden and urgent need to have a bowel movement.

Fatigue and disturbed sleep: Many people with IBS experience fatigue and sleep disturbances, often due to the impact of the condition on daily life.

How is IBS managed?

The management of IBS typically involves a combination of lifestyle changes, dietary modifications, stress management, and, in some cases, medication. It's important to consult a healthcare professional for a proper diagnosis and to develop an individualized treatment plan.

Stress management: Practicing stress-reducing techniques such as deep breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, or engaging in activities that promote relaxation can help manage IBS symptoms.

Regular exercise: Engaging in regular physical activity can help improve digestion and reduce stress.

Medications: Depending on the symptoms and their severity, a healthcare professional may prescribe medications such as antispasmodics, anti-diarrheal drugs, laxatives, or low-dose antidepressants to help manage IBS symptoms.

The treatment needs to be individualized for each patient.

What dietary changes are beneficial in IBS?

Identifying and avoiding trigger foods such as certain types of carbohydrates, spicy foods, caffeine, and alcohol. A diet low in fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols (FODMAPs) is recommended. Keeping a food diary can help identify potential triggers. Gradually increasing the amount of dietary fiber can help regulate bowel movements. However, some people with IBS may find that a high-fiber diet worsens their symptoms.