

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a bowel disorder characterized by abdominal pain, constipation and/or diarrhea, bloating and gas. The exact cause of IBS remains unsolved, however, factors including diet, stress, and medications can enhance symptoms. The risk for developing IBS increases in individuals who have an acute gastrointestinal infection.

What Can You Do?

There is currently no treatment for IBS, however, changes to your diet and stress level can reduce symptoms. Your doctor may also prescribe a medication to reduce muscle spasms if symptoms are severe.

Try the following:

1. Decrease stress levels by taking part in tension-relieving activities including sports, hobbies, exercise, and relaxation techniques.
2. Eat a healthy, balanced diet by following the habits below:
 - a. Eat regular meals
 - b. Chew and eat foods thoroughly and slowly
 - c. Avoid large portions and overeating. Small frequent meals may be better tolerated
 - d. Avoid gum chewing, carbonated beverages and using a straw to avoid swallowing air
3. Avoid common irritants such as:
 - a. Tobacco
 - b. Spicy foods
 - c. Alcohol
 - d. Caffeine
 - e. Concentrated fruit juices (ie, orange juice)
4. Avoid artificial sweeteners
5. If dairy products bother you, you may be lactose intolerant and need to limit intake. Dairy products will make symptoms worse if you are lactose intolerant.
6. Limit fatty and fried foods
7. Gradually increase your soluble and insoluble fiber intake with:
 - a. Fruits
 - b. Vegetables
 - c. Bran and other whole grains
 - d. Legumes such as kidney, pinto, and garbanzo beans
8. Increase fluid intake while increasing your fiber intake
9. Keep a food diary to note any intolerance with certain foods. This will help you to know which foods to avoid in the future.