

IBS— More Than Just Irritating

IBS Facts

Minimizing Stress for a Healthier You!

Blue Cross Earns "A" Rating

Healthcare Advisor: A Smart Tool

IBS – More Than Just Irritating

It's known by many names, and let's face it, none pleasant. Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), also referred to as irritable colon, spastic colitis or nervous stomach, is one of the most common disorders seen by primary care doctors and gastroenterologists.

IBS is a disturbance in the regulation of the bowel function and usually involves the large and small intestines. Often a long-term or recurrent disorder, IBS affects approximately one in five people.

Symptoms of IBS vary, but typically include abdominal pain or discomfort, cramping, bloating, gas, diarrhea and/or constipation. While there is no specific test for IBS, it is often diagnosed with the help of routine tests or by ruling out other conditions.

Physicians typically begin with a medical history and physical exam. Often they will order a complete blood count test to check for inflammation and a fecal occult blood test to check for blood in the stool.

A colonoscopy is sometimes used to rule out polyps or tumors in the intestinal tract. Since irritable bowel symptoms often mimic other intestinal problems, such as ulcers or gallstones, additional testing might include a gallbladder ultrasound or a barium enema, which is an X-ray of the large intestine.

Treatment usually focuses on diet and lifestyle changes, such as managing stress. Your doctor may suggest limiting foods that make diarrhea worse, such as caffeine, alcohol or fatty or gaseous foods. Doctors often recommend adding fiber, drinking water and regular exercise to help eliminate or minimize IBS symptoms.

Medication may also be used to lessen symptoms. In some cases low doses of antidepressants are prescribed to IBS sufferers. Other effective treatments include

meditation or relaxation or alternative herbal treatments such as peppermint oil to prevent stomach cramping.

IBS often affects the emotional, physical and social well-being of those who live with it. While there is no real cure for IBS, the condition is usually manageable.

April is Irritable Bowel Syndrome Awareness Month. To learn more about IBS, ask your doctor or visit aboutibs.org or familydoctor.org.

Sources: aboutibs.org • familydoctor.org

IBS Facts

- Between 25 and 45 million people in the U.S. are affected by IBS.
- Approximately 60-65 percent of IBS sufferers are female.
- Stress doesn't cause IBS, but it can trigger symptoms.
- IBS affects people of all ages.
- Colonoscopies are recommended for people over 50 to help screen out cancer.
- IBS symptoms are manageable, but there is no permanent cure.
- Symptoms may include abdominal pain or discomfort, bloating, diarrhea and/or constipation.
- "Irritable" means nerve endings in the bowel wall are unusually sensitive.



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Minimizing Stress for a Healthier You!

There's no escaping stress in today's fast-paced, multi-tasking society. Some stress can even provide healthy motivation. But, chronic stress can raise cortisol levels, which can cause high blood pressure and other health concerns. Chronic stress can also weaken the immune system and attract colds, flu or other health problems such as irritable bowel syndrome or heart disease. Some people are more stress-prone than others, so, if you fit into that category — and many of us do — here are some tips to help minimize daily stress.

- Exercise to keep your body running smoothly.
- Eat small, manageable meals and avoid binging on carbohydrates, which can raise blood sugar levels and create a "low" after an initial "high."
- Keep a gratitude journal to remind you of the areas in your life that are working well.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Practice yoga or meditate to calm the body and mind.
- Limit multi-tasking as much as possible to allow your mind to settle.
- Take deep, relaxing breaths throughout the day.

Blue Cross Earns "A" Rating

National rating service Standard & Poor's has given Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana its 11th consecutive "A" rating for financial strength, citing the company's strong competitive position in the Louisiana health insurance market.

Standard & Poor's is the world's foremost provider of benchmarks for measuring corporate financial health. Its 2007 report on Blue Cross states, "Compared with its key competitors ... BCBSLA's competitive advantages include the strength of its Blue brand, its having the broadest contractual access to provider networks in the state, and its good customer service."

Healthcare Advisor: A Smart Tool

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