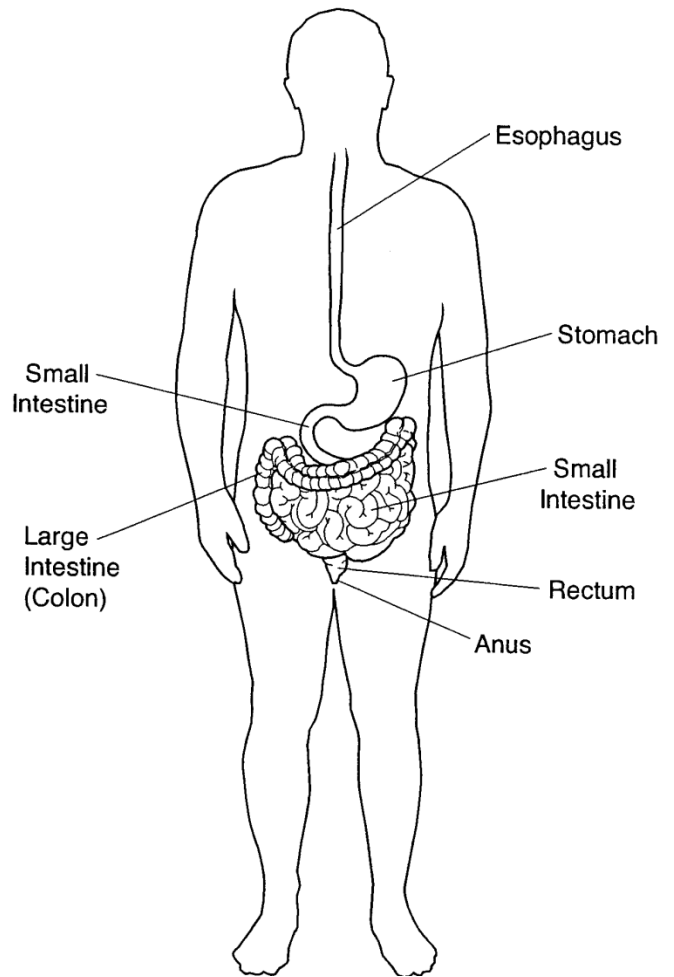


Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

IBS is a common gastrointestinal (GI) tract problem that affects the large intestine, also called the colon. When your body digests food, nutrients pass through the small intestine before heading to the large intestine. In the large intestine, water is absorbed, and the remaining waste is changed into solid stool for elimination.

IBS causes a change in bowel habits, diarrhea, constipation and abdominal discomfort on a recurring basis. The discomfort may be relieved after having a bowel movement.

With IBS, the structure of the large intestine is not damaged and remains normal. However, the muscles and lining of the colon are sensitive and react to food digestion.



Risk

There is no one specific cause for IBS.

Research shows several factors leading to IBS:

- Genetics or heredity: IBS is more common in families with a history of GI problems. This can include problems with GI motility or with how intestinal muscles and the lining react to the movement of digested food.
- Food sensitivity: An allergy or food sensitivity can trigger signs of IBS.

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Learn more about your health care.

- Infection with bacterial gastroenteritis: An infection of the lining of the stomach or intestines can trigger signs of IBS.
- Endocrine or hormone problems: Problems with hormones and signals moving between the brain and the GI tract can trigger signs of IBS.

Signs of IBS

Signs can vary and be mild to severe. Stress and menstrual cycles in women can also affect signs. Signs of IBS include:

- Abdominal discomfort or pain
- Cramping, gas or bloating
- Constipation, diarrhea or both
- Changes in bowel habits
- Mucus in stool

Your doctor will ask about your abdominal discomfort for the last 12 weeks or 3 months. Keep a journal of your signs to share with your doctor.

Testing

Your doctor will take your medical history and do a physical exam. One or more of these tests may be done to check if you have IBS or if another health problem is causing your signs:

- **Laboratory tests:** A stool sample may be taken and blood tests may be done.
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** A thin, flexible tube with a camera may be used to check the lower part of the colon called the sigmoid colon. Please read the handout, [Flexible Sigmoidoscopy](#), for more information.
- **Colonoscopy:** A thin, flexible tube with a camera may be used to check the entire length of the colon. Please read the handout, [Colonoscopy](#), for more information.

Special Note: For many of these tests, special bowel prep is needed. It is important to follow the instructions as directed by your doctor or the test may need to be rescheduled. It is also important to have a responsible adult to take you home after these tests. You may not be able to drive yourself or go home alone for your health and safety.

Treatment

One or more of these treatments may be needed:

- **Medicines:** Medicines such as stool softeners, laxatives and anti-diarrheals may be used to treat signs of IBS. Medicines may be ordered to reduce colon muscle spasms and reduce abdominal pain.
- **Changes in diet and nutrition:** Eating smaller meals more often may help IBS signs. Eat foods low in fat and high in carbohydrates. Avoid caffeinated drinks, alcohol, milk products, artificial sweeteners or foods that can cause gas and bloating, such as beans and cabbage. Eat foods high in fiber to help with constipation. Aim for 25 to 35 grams of fiber a day. Increasing fiber in the diet may not relieve abdominal discomfort.
- **Supplement Use:** Supplements may be recommended such as probiotics to improve bacterial flora in the digestive system or fiber supplements for constipation.

✦ **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**