



## Irritable Bowel Disease

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), also called spastic colon by some people, is a common condition affecting the intestines and bowel.

### What are the Symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

IBS is characterised by symptoms including bloating, cramps, heartburn, diarrhoea and constipation. For some people these can cause great discomfort. However it is not life threatening and it is not related to cancer or does not cause permanent damage to the bowel.

### What is the Incidence of IBS in Ireland?

The exact incidence of IBS in Ireland is unknown but estimates in other European countries indicate between 15-20% of the adult population suffer with this problem. Females are twice as likely to be affected as males.

### What causes IBS?

IBS is a complex condition for which there is no known cause. However, many doctors now agree that symptoms can be triggered by psychological as well as physical factors.

In a normal gut, food is moved along the gut by controlled and rhythmic contractions to aid digestion. In IBS, the normal rhythm of intestinal contractions is disrupted, resulting in diarrhoea or constipation or intestinal spasms or a mixture of all three.

The bowel in people with IBS also is more sensitive than usual and an attack may be triggered by certain foods that would not bother most people. This also offers some explanation as to why symptoms are exaggerated after eating. Stress and hormonal changes have also been indicated as possible causes.

If you are passing blood in your stools or have lost weight unintentionally these are **not** symptoms of IBS and medical help should be sought.

### How is IBS diagnosed?

There is no definite test for IBS. Your doctor will make the diagnosis based on your medical history; a medical examination and he may look into your bowel with a special camera.

### How is IBS treated?

Your doctor will discuss treatment options but in many cases there is no treatment needed at all. Some doctors may refer you to the dietetic department where advice will be given on reducing your dietary symptoms. With IBS you may be advised on a high fibre diet if you are repeatedly suffering from constipation or you may be put on a low residue diet if you suffer from loose motions. In some cases you may be asked to eliminate certain foods from your diet.

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