



# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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## Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), also called spastic colon, is an irritation disorder of the colon. IBS is twice as common in women than men. IBS is not contagious or cancerous. It can, however, be a source of embarrassment and frustration. IBS is a chronic disorder, with recurrences throughout life.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Crampy abdominal pain
- Gas
- Fatigue
- Urgency (Dumping Syndrome)
- Nausea
- Alternating diarrhea with constipation

### CAUSES

The cause of IBS is not well understood. Situations such as stress, anxiety, and depression can increase symptoms, as well as poor diet, smoking, alcohol use, lack of sleep, and certain foods.

### DIAGNOSIS

There is no specific test to diagnosis IBS. Your practitioner may order labs or refer you to a gastroenterologist, to rule out serious or chronic conditions such as parasites, Crohn's disease, and ulcerative colitis, or ulcers.

### TREATMENT

Treatment is geared towards reducing the frequency and symptoms of attacks. One of the most important measures you can take is to increase fiber in your diet. See the back of this handout for a list of high fiber foods. You should try to eat a total of 25 grams of fiber per day. Also, certain foods such as milk, spicy foods, and coffee can greatly increase your symptoms, so these items should be avoided or decreased if they cause symptoms.

Quit smoking, or at least decrease the amount. Avoid alcohol, and try to reduce the amount of stress and anxiety in your life. Medications such as Donnatal and Simethicone can reduce abdominal pain, cramping, and gas.

### NOTIFY YOUR PRACTITIONER OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Fever
- Bloody, tarry-like stools
- Vomiting
- Weight loss
- Symptoms do not improve with treatment

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