

Symptoms

Irritable bowel syndrome

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Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common condition that affects the digestive system.

It causes symptoms like stomach cramps, bloating, diarrhoea and constipation. These tend to come and go over time, and can last for days, weeks or months at a time.

It can be very frustrating to live with and can have a big impact on your everyday life. It can be a lifelong problem.

There's no cure, but diet changes and medicines can often help control the symptoms.

The exact cause is unknown but IBS has been linked to things like:

- food passing through your gut too quickly or too slowly
- oversensitive nerves in your gut
- [stress](#)
- a family history of IBS

Symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

The main symptoms of IBS are:

- stomach pain or cramps – usually worse after eating and better after doing a poo
- bloating – your tummy may feel uncomfortably full and swollen
- diarrhoea – you may have watery poo and sometimes need to poo suddenly
- constipation – you may strain when pooing and feel like you cannot empty your bowels fully

There may be days when your symptoms are better and days when they're worse (flare-ups). They may be triggered by food or drink.

What can trigger IBS symptoms

IBS flare-ups can happen for no obvious reason.

Sometimes they have a trigger like:

- [alcohol](#)
- caffeine
- certain foods, such as spicy or fatty food
- [stress and anxiety](#)

Other symptoms of IBS

Other symptoms of IBS can include:

- farting (flatulence)
- passing mucus from your bottom
- tiredness and a lack of energy
- feeling sick (nausea)
- backache
- needing to pee often, sudden urges to pee, and feeling like you cannot fully empty your bladder
- not always being able to control when you poo (incontinence)

See a GP if you think you might have IBS

They can check for IBS and do some tests to rule out other problems.

Ask for an urgent appointment if you have:

- lost a lot of weight for no reason
- bleeding from your bottom or bloody diarrhoea
- a hard lump or swelling in your tummy
- shortness of breath, noticeable heartbeats (palpitations) and pale skin

These could be signs of something more serious.

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