

SHARE THE WELLNESS TIP



July 31, 2015

More Than Just a Stomachache



You may have heard of the terms “spastic colon” or “nervous bowel.” But the real name of this common problem – which affects up to 20 percent of U.S. adults at some time in their lives – is irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). More women than men are diagnosed with IBS and it is second only to the common cold as a cause of absenteeism from work. IBS usually begins in late adolescence or early adult life – most often at times of emotional stress. It is not a disease, but rather a *syndrome*, defined as a group of symptoms. People with IBS usually suffer from frequent bouts of constipation or diarrhea, or alternate between the two, for three months or more. The condition can be chronic. Other symptoms include: abdominal cramps, bloating, gas, and bowel movements with mucus.

In people with IBS, the intestines, or bowels, do not work normally. Sometimes, their intestines may work too quickly or forcefully. Other times, the intestines may be too weak or slow. This may be caused by sensitivity to food and stress.

Help for IBS

If you have IBS, you can ease and prevent symptoms. Here are some tips:

- ☀ Some foods can cause diarrhea. If dairy products bother you, your body may have trouble digesting lactose, the sugar in milk. Talk to your doctor if this is a problem. Try keeping a food journal for a few weeks to determine which foods you may need to remove from your diet.
- ☀ Eating smaller meals more often, or eating smaller portions, may help IBS symptoms. Large meals can cause cramping and diarrhea if you have IBS.
- ☀ Eating foods that are low in fat and high in carbohydrates, such as pasta, rice, whole-grain breads and cereals, fruits, and vegetables, may help.
- ☀ Ask your doctor before taking a fiber supplement.
- ☀ Don't smoke.
- ☀ Engage in regular exercise.
- ☀ Be patient. It may take more than six months for symptoms to fade. If necessary, your doctor may prescribe medicines to help your intestines work more normally.

Sources: National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America