



A guide to...

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Patient Information

What happens now my tests are normal?

A guide to help ensure you know the next steps in managing IBS symptoms

What is irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common, long-term condition of the digestive system. **IBS** can cause bouts of stomach cramps, bloating, diarrhoea and/or constipation (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/>). One-in-five people is thought to be affected at some point in their life, with women twice as likely than men.

Symptoms vary between individuals and affect some people more severely than others. Symptoms tend to last a few days to a few months often during times of stress or after eating certain foods, and may come and go in this time period.

You may find some of the symptoms of IBS ease after going to the toilet and opening your bowels. The condition is often lifelong, although it may improve over several years.

What are the causes of IBS

The exact cause of IBS is unknown, however most experts think it is related to increased sensitivity of the gut and problems with gut motility (contraction).

These problems may mean that you are more sensitive to pain coming from your gut, and you may become constipated or have diarrhoea because your food passes through your gut either too slowly or too quickly. Psychological factors such as stress may also play a part in IBS.

What will happen now?

You may now have had a normal test such as Colonoscopy and/ or Gastroscopy as well as normal biopsies (samples) taken from the bowel. You should have also had routine blood tests done, with normal findings including negative coeliac serology (wheat allergy test).

People with IBS will experience different symptoms, and the right information on general lifestyle, physical activity, and diet to effectively manage symptoms is important. It may be worthwhile keeping a detailed log of what exacerbates or relieves your symptoms to aid a tailored approach to your treatment should you require further contact with your GP.

How is IBS treated

There is no cure for IBS, but the symptoms can often be managed by making changes to your diet and lifestyle.

For example, it may help to:

- identify and avoid foods or drinks that trigger your symptoms
- alter the amount of fibre in your diet
- exercise regularly
- reduce your stress levels.
- per day (a portion should be approximately 80 g).

Dietary advice

- Have regular meals and take time to eat.
- Avoid missing meals or leaving long gaps between eating.
- Drink at least eight cups of fluid per day, especially water or other non caffeinated drinks, for example herbal teas.
- Restrict tea and coffee to three cups per day.
- Reduce intake of alcohol and fizzy drinks.
- It may be helpful to limit intake of high-fibre food (such as wholemeal or high-fibre flour and breads, cereals high in bran, and whole grains such as brown rice).
- Reduce intake of 'resistant starch' (starch that resists digestion in the small intestine and reaches the colon intact), which is often found in processed or re-cooked foods.
- Limit fresh fruit to three portions.
- People with diarrhoea should avoid sorbitol, an artificial sweetener found in sugar-free sweets (including chewing gum) and drinks, and in some diabetic and slimming products.
- People with wind and bloating may find it helpful to eat oats (such as oat based breakfast cereal or porridge) and linseeds (up to one tablespoon per day). Reducing wheat intake may also prove beneficial.

What next?

Your Pharmacist can help with advice about medication such as antispasmodics, antimotility agents and laxatives to manage your symptoms. Your GP can prescribe other medications such as amitriptyline which is used in very low doses to improve bowel motility and reduce pain.

Other treatments for example, cognitive behavioural therapy / hypnotherapy are avenues which may also be explored by you and your GP.

If you feel your symptoms have worsened despite following the this advice, or you develop different symptoms in the future such as rectal bleeding and weight, please contact your GP.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

Please do not hesitate to call the Telephone Assessment Clinic if you have any questions or concerns. This is an answer phone service, please leave a message and someone will call you back within one working day.

Telepone Assessment Clinic: Telephone number: **01442 287811**

Other sources of information

www.bsq.org.uk

<https://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/CG61>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/>

