



Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What is IBS?

An “irritable” bowel is one which does not function smoothly. The contractions of rhythm of the colon are disturbed.

“Syndrome” means a group of symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

- Crampy abdominal pain
- Diarrhoea and/or constipation
- Bloating and excess wind
- Mucous can be present in the stool

What causes IBS?

It is still not known what causes IBS although we know the muscle contractions of the colon, peristalsis, that moves bowel content along the intestines are not well co-ordinated. It is a functional disorder — there is usually no visual sign of the disease when the bowel is examined. IBS can cause a lot of discomfort and stress but it does not cause any permanent harm or serious disease such as cancer.

How is the bowel affected?

Waste products move too slowly through the colon and too much water is absorbed by the body resulting in constipation, or waste moves too fast and not enough water is removed resulting in diarrhoea.

Who usually gets IBS?

Anyone can develop IBS although the symptoms usually begin in early adulthood. IBS is more common in younger people. In UK about 20% of the population may have IBS. Women seem to be twice as likely as men to get IBS.

How did I get IBS?

The onset of IBS may be triggered by an infection or inflammation of the gut or by injury to the gut. However, usually there is no identifiable cause.

What can make the symptoms worse?

Some people relate flare-ups to specific stressful states or to ongoing every day stress. You may notice that certain foods, for example spicy foods or dairy products make your symptoms worse. Also certain medications can make constipation worse.

How is IBS diagnosed?

When you visit your doctor, he/she will ask you questions about your symptoms and how long and how often you have had these. They may also give you a physical examination and possibly send you for a colonoscopy. This is to ensure that there is nothing else wrong with you and to rule out other conditions with similar symptoms.

What can I do to prevent or relieve IBS?

- Your doctor will advise you on diet and lifestyle factors. They may prescribe medications to help you get through severe episodes.
- Keep a diary of what you eat and drink. There may be certain foods which trigger your symptoms.
- Slowly increase the fibre in your diet. This helps to keep other food moving through the intestine, it also holds water and softens the stool to make it easier to pass. A rapid increase in your fibre intake can cause bloating and gas.
- Try to reduce the amount of stress in your life. Attending relaxation training or stress management programmes may help you.
- Make a positive lifestyle change e.g.stop smoking and exercise more often, which helps intestinal movement and is stress relieving.
- Respond to the urge to move your bowels. If you delay you may have to strain later.

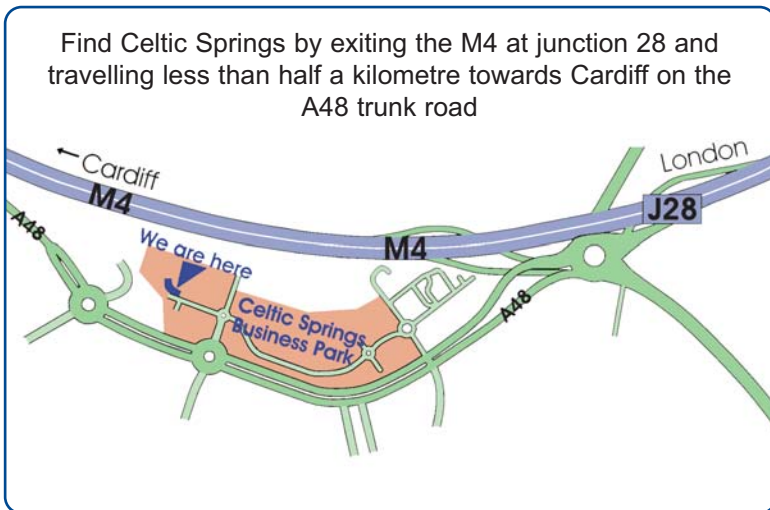
Because IBS can occur on and off over many years, it is recommended that you visit your doctor during difficult times or if new symptoms develop. Your doctor may wish to change the way your IBS is managed.

It is important to remember that many treatable and potentially serious conditions can exhibit similar symptoms to IBS. In some ways, the diagnosis is reached through exclusion of other problems such as colitis, diverticulitis, tumours, ulcers, gallstones and other illnesses. Your doctor will help determine which investigations are necessary during the diagnosis and management of your IBS.

For further information:
www.corecharity.org.uk

This fact sheet was designed to help you. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of our specialists and nurses.

If you have any problems following your procedure call Nucleus Healthcare during opening hours
08:00 hrs. — 18:00 hrs.



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