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Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a long-term (chronic) condition of the gut (bowel) that causes episodes of tummy (abdominal) cramps, bloating and either constipation or diarrhoea. IBS is a problem with how the bowel works. There is otherwise nothing wrong with the bowel.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) may not cause any harm to your body but it sometimes causes a lot of discomfort. It isn't known what causes IBS. The symptoms can range from mild to severe. There is no cure for IBS but some simple lifestyle changes and treatments usually make the symptoms much better.

What is it and who gets it?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is common. It is thought to affect about 1 in 5 people in the UK at some time in their lives. In IBS, the function of the gut is upset, yet all parts of the gut look normal, even when looked at under a microscope. IBS can affect anyone at any age but it most often first develops in young adults. Women are affected more often than men.

What is the outlook?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) usually causes symptoms long-term and often stays with you for the rest of your life. However, the symptoms tend to come and go. You may have long spells without any symptoms, or may have only mild symptoms. Treatment can often help to ease symptoms when they flare up. IBS often improves with time and, in some cases, symptoms clear up for good at some stage.

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Symptoms

Further reading & references

- Irritable bowel syndrome in adults: diagnosis and management of irritable bowel syndrome in primary care; NICE Clinical Guideline (February 2008, updated April 2017)
- Irritable bowel syndrome; NICE CKS, February 2013 (UK access only)
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