

Chapter 1: What Is IBS and What Causes It?

IBS is a serious condition that millions of people suffer from each and every year. It's been around for a long time, but now with a recognizable name, there may be hope for IBS sufferers everywhere. To begin, let's take a look at what the top people in their fields know about IBS, its causes and how this translates to you.

What is Known About IBS?

Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or IBS, is the most commonly diagnosed disease by gastroenterologists. 1 in every 5 people in the United States currently suffers from this condition and many may not even know it. Some people may feel as though they are alone in their suffering, but you are never alone. About 20% of the population is dealing with this condition today. Plus, about 2/3 of all those diagnosed with IBS are women.

Many doctors say that there is no cure for IBS. That is because they have no idea WHAT IBS is, really. But don't be alarmed. The purpose of this e-book is to inform you that there are ways you can deal with, treat and even cure your IBS outside of conventional medicine.



Modern medicine does not have the answers.

If you experience painful abdominal bloating, cramping, constipation, diarrhea or alternating bouts of constipation and diarrhea, you may very well have IBS.

Is There a History of IBS?

IBS is certainly not new. You could generally think that as long as people have had colons, there have been people who've had IBS. Although, it is possible that IBS may be exacerbated by modern day food processing and our enormous consumption of protein-rich and fatty foods.

Further more, IBS used to be considered just a psychological affliction. Imagine the pain and suffering millions went through only to hear that they had a "nervous stomach" or a "spastic colon!" How unhelpful is that? Luckily, modern medicine has made advances in understanding this complex condition. Unfortunately, this does not directly translate into definite cures for many IBS sufferers.

What Causes IBS?

IBS is classified as a functional disorder. This means that there is a problem with the way the colon functions in the body that produces many unpleasant symptoms. This also means that there is not a biochemical, structural or underlying condition that causes IBS. There is a problem with how the muscles in the colon or the nerves that control them are working. A few times a day, the colon contracts and helps move food through the digestive system to ultimately be eliminated. But in a person with IBS, the colon will contract at the slightest stimuli causing diarrhea or constipation to result. However, it can present itself in a variety of ways and is quite hard to diagnose.

There has been a misguided belief in recent years that IBS is psychosomatic, or entirely in your head. But this simply is not the case. While conditions like anxiety

disorders and stress can aggravate IBS, they are not the actual causes of the condition.

The actual causes of IBS are unknown and may be quite multifaceted. It is currently believed that IBS may be caused by a high sensitivity of the colon. However, a concrete cause has not been found. In those diagnosed with this disorder, their symptoms may be exacerbated by several things including:

- Alcohol
- Anxiety disorders.
- Caffeine
- Certain foods
- Certain medications
- Menstruation
- Stress

A recent study has shown that IBS may actually be caused by the presence of a certain type of bacteria in the colon. But again, nothing is conclusive.

Do foods cause IBS? If so what are they and which ones are the worst offenders?

The cause of IBS is unknown. But, certain foods can exacerbate the symptoms of this condition. In order to truly get your IBS under control, you will most likely need to make some serious dietary changes. However, this does not mean you have to cut out all of your favorites. Some particularly offensive foods include:

- Alcohol: Alcoholic drinks can really irritate the GI tract, especially on an empty stomach.

- **Artificial Fats:** Olestra is the latest and greatest in artificial fats that are on the market today. While it may serve its purpose well in maintaining the flavor of fatty foods, it can wreak havoc on just about anyone's stomach, especially those who struggle with IBS.
- **Artificial Sweeteners:** Artificial sweeteners like sorbitol can cause diarrhea in even non-IBS sufferers! Imagine what it would do to you? Diet sodas and some sugarless candies contain these sweeteners that could send you running straight for the bathroom. Not to mention having to suffer through abdominal cramps and gas.



Foods high in sugar or artificial sugars can aggravate IBS.

- **Caffeine:** Anything that stimulates the GI tract can be especially problematic to IBS sufferers. Caffeine can cause the digestive tract to spasm more frequently, bringing about more severe IBS reactions.

- Carbonation: Carbonated beverages like sodas can bring about a whole host of problems including gas and bloating.
- Chocolate: Baking chocolate typically does not cause a problem, but solid chocolate can be just the thing to spur on an IBS attack.
- Coffee: Its caffeine content alone can cause some serious stomach troubles, but the added factor of acidity in even decaf coffee can cause an IBS uproar.
- Foods High In Fat: I know what you're thinking, this could be any food! But really, foods that are super high in fat only work to make your IBS worse, not better. Some examples of foods with a high fat content include potato chips, red meat, cheese, milk and egg yolks.
- Fried Foods: Fatty, greasy, deep-fried foods can bring about serious IBS complications. While they may taste great, the after-effects aren't usually worth it.
- Gluten: Any foods that contain gluten are not good for you and will cause you to suffer more than necessary. See Chapter 6 for a full explanation on gluten and the foods you should avoid.
- Nuts: Nuts are often a prime suspect of food allergy in some people, which can be even more pronounced in those with IBS.
- Poultry: The dark meat and skin of poultry can be offensive to the IBS sufferer's GI tract.

Can conventional medication sometimes have an adverse effect on IBS with some people?

Absolutely! How many times have you been prescribed a medication, only to read the side effects to see that it will cause many symptoms similar to that of your IBS? How frustrating can that be? For some, these side effects may just be a passing nuisance, but to a person who has IBS, it can be simply awful and disruptive to your life.

Even more alarming is the fact that many of the prescription medications intended to treat IBS can actually make symptoms worse for some people. For instance, those with IBS that fluctuate between constipation and diarrhea may be caught in the middle with a medication that eases diarrhea, let's say, but actually causes constipation. This can be incredibly discouraging, considering that people go to the doctor thinking they will be helped, not harmed.

How does stress worsen IBS?

Stress can wreak havoc on your body in general, but IBS sufferers tend to complain of stress-related IBS attacks quite often. Feeling emotionally, physically or intellectually overwhelmed can cause colon spasms, increasing your already existing IBS symptoms.

When you are stressed, you may experience butterflies or a nervous stomach. When you have IBS, however, this stress can make you hyper aware of all the goings on in your colon—every little gas pocket and air bubble is noticeable. The ability to feel these sensations can be uncomfortable and may cause even more stress in some people. Talk about a vicious circle!

Can sitting cause pain and discomfort for IBS sufferers?

When sitting for extended periods of time, you may become even more aware of the whirling and churning going on inside of your intestines. If you are constipated, this sitting can make you feel even more “stagnant” while if you have diarrhea, you may feel each and every gurgle in your gut.

Most notably, however, is the fact that sitting or lying down immediately following a meal can slow down the digestive process even more. If you have IBS with constipation, this can be particularly bad for your body. This is especially the case if you’ve eaten a food that you may be sensitive to. Sitting down after a meal can make the colon react even more to this “trigger” food.

How do anti-depressants trigger severe attacks of IBS?

Anti-depressants are often prescribed for IBS sufferers in an attempt to ease the pain and cramping while helping to “relax” the colon. But use of these medications can actually trigger IBS symptoms in some people or make their already present symptoms even worse!

Antidepressants can help ease the abdominal pain associated with IBS, however, if you are not depressed, it is not recommended that you take these medications. Plus, if you are one of the many people who alternate between bouts of constipation and diarrhea, anti-depressants can make either of these worse! For instance, tricyclic anti-depressants tend to cause constipation, while SSRI anti-depressants can cause diarrhea! The goal of your IBS treatment plan should be to balance your sensitive stomach, not throw it from one extreme to the other.