

# Hope & Healing

## Irritable Bowel Syndrome

A heart at peace gives life to the body — Proverbs 14:30

### Introduction

Some bowels are grumpy and irritable, just like some people. The cause and the cure of Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or IBS, is not known. If you have it, x-rays and other tests are usually done to be sure nothing else is wrong. With IBS the x-rays are normal but the fact remains, something has gone wrong. With certain foods, drinks, and stressful events in your life — things that don't usually wreck havoc on other people — you will get alternating bouts of diarrhea, constipation, and abdominal pain.

Sometimes one follows the other quickly, keeping you so focused on your symptoms that you're afraid to go to dinner parties, seek a job, or travel on a bus, train, or plane.

Evan so, IBS is not serious in the sense that it doesn't cause cancer or any other dread disease. And with attention to proper diet, stress management, and sometimes the use of medications, most persons can keep IBS under control.

### Symptoms

Remember, you can have a bowel movement every third day or three movements a day and both patterns are normal. Normal also means that the movement will be formed but not hard, contains no blood, and is passed without cramps or pain.

The most common pattern of IBS is a combination of constipation, diarrhea, abdominal pain, gas, and bloating. Sometimes the discomfort is mild. Sometimes more severe. The severest form is rare. It's a painless diarrhea which strikes as watery diarrhea almost every day following breakfast. Then,

other episodes of diarrhea will occur after other meals or for no apparent reasons. Although IBS is usually a mild to moderate annoyance, this form can be disabling.

Fortunately, there are lots of things that can be done to soothe the irritability from your bowel.

- **Take the news in stride.** If you're told that IBS is your problem, don't get so stressed by the news that your bowels and you get caught up in a vicious cycle. Think about what this means. Recognize that you've had trouble before and it too passed. After all, IBS won't kill you.
- **Relax more.** IBS is also known as spastic colon and learning to unwind will help relieve the symptoms. Find what works for you; relaxation techniques, meditation, biofeedback, or self-hypnosis. If stress is significant in your life, a psychological counselor may be able to help with a few sessions.
- **Write it down.** Keep a stress diary. Become more precise in identifying what stresses you most. If, for example, your boss gives you a pain in the belly, write down what seems to be the underlying issue and try to resolve it. Talking with a friend, family member, or counselor can also be a way to calm your bowel.
- **Log in what you eat and drink.** When a food or drink seems to activate your bowel, write it down. This way you'll find your own peculiar patterns and the foods associated with them.
- **Add fiber.** Most experts recommend that we need 20 to 35 grams of fiber a day. If you have IBS you need to look at your intake of bran cereals, whole grains, fruit, and vegetables. This is particularly true if your stool is

small and hard, but it can also be true if you have diarrhea. You'll have to experiment a bit to find your own best fiber level.

- **Call on psyllium seed.** An easy but expensive way to add fiber to your diet is with crushed psyllium seed. Most of us are familiar with Metamucil and psyllium-based laxatives found on drugstore shelves. The brand that contains the most psyllium per dose is Konsyl. These products are nonaddicting, will not cause laxative habit, and are generally safe, even when taken over long periods.
- **Drink up.** In general six to eight glasses of fluid are required each day. Water will do quite well. More will be necessary if you work out in the heat of August than will be required when sitting by the fire in December.
- **Check our dairy products.** To be such a good source of calcium, milk certainly gives many persons a lot of trouble. If you lack the enzyme to digest milk sugar, you can get diarrhea that is very similar to IBS.  
Give up dairy products for several days and see if any of your symptoms improve. If you get a lot of relief you can either avoid dairy products entirely or try a brand called Lactaid milk, which contains sugar that is already digested.

- **Cut the fat.** There are lots of reasons to cut fat and IBS is a primary one. The fat in fried foods, heavy sauces, and salad oils are a major stimulus to the colon's contractions. So, cut the fat and see if it helps.
- **Easy on the gas.** Gas producing foods such as beans, cauliflower, collards, brussels sprouts, broccoli and onions are a source of bloating and gas for some persons with IBS. If you are among the sensitive ones, try avoiding the gas producers.
- **Fold in the fiber slowly.** If you are adding bran as fiber your bowel may protest if you add it too fast or take in too much. Go slow and avoid distention.
- **Beware the spices.** You can test your sensitivity to peppers and other spices by eating spicy foods for one week and switching to bland foods the next week. Note, if IBS flares when you're high on the spices, cut them out.
- **Watch the acids.** Here's another food category where a little experimentation may be in order. Lay off oranges, grapefruits, tomatoes and vinegary salad dressings and see whether you get better or not.
- **Coffee brews trouble.** Coffee is a major cause of bowel woe for some persons with IBS, either because of the caffeine or because of the resins in the coffee beans. Switching to decaffeinated coffee or cutting down on regular coffee will usually help.
- **Cut the booze.** IBS causes trouble in drinkers who are fond of beer and red wine. The beer's complex carbohydrates and red wine's tannic acid seem to be bowel irritants if you have IBS.
- **Smoke not.** The nicotine in cigarettes is presumably the substance that gives smokers with IBS a lot of trouble.
- **Spit out the gum.** Nicotine gum, when trying to quit smoking, is as irritating to the bowel as the nicotine in smoke. And other gums and candies that contain sorbitol can

cause diarrhea because the sorbitol isn't easily digested, especially if 8 or 10 pieces are eaten or chewed in a day's time.

- **Regular and small meals.** Big meals overstimulate the digestive system. Frequent but small meals are better than infrequent larger ones.
- **Jogging.** Good body tone from exercise means better bowel tone. Exercise also relieves stress and produces endorphins that help control pain. This is not strenuous exercise which can cause diarrhea but slow and easy exercise for about 30 minutes. Actually walking will do nicely.
- **Prescribed medicines.** There is no one medicine for IBS. Tranquilizers and medicines to relieve bowel spasms are sometimes prescribed. Pain medicines are prescribed, especially during menstrual periods, to offset the effects of hormonal changes.
- **Heat to the rescue.** When pain strikes the lower abdomen, try lying flat with a warm, moist towel covering your belly. Try to relax. Take a deep breath. A hot water bottle or a heating pad can be used as a substitute for the towel.

### Summary \_\_\_\_\_

As you see, much can be done to relieve IBS. First, be precise as you can about what triggers your symptoms. Learn to relax, and try the other steps too.

## Awaken the Miracle Within You

### The Miracle of a Relaxing Routine

Here are ten ways to unwind.

1. Walk barefoot as much as possible.
2. Lie down on the grass and watch the clouds go by.
3. Hug a tree. They remind us of the earth's vitality and continuity of being.
4. Read something you don't usually read.
5. Set aside 20 minutes each day for non-thinking stillness.
6. Play spiritual music. Hymns can relax you.
7. Read the Bible.
8. Get up and dance to your favorite music.
9. Do anything, "Just for the fun of it."
10. Go fly a kite.

*The recommendations and information in this handout are appropriate in most cases. However, for specific information concerning your personal medical condition, please, consult your doctor.*