

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome is also known as spastic colon. It affects 1 in 7 women and 1 in 10 men. It is a chronic condition with fluctuating symptoms.

Common symptoms include:

- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Cramping abdominal pain
- Mucous production
- Abnormal consistency of stools
- Bloating
- Tiredness, weakness, difficulty concentrating
- Often associated with symptoms of dyspepsia (see “Non-ulcer Dyspepsia”)

If these symptoms occur, further investigations may be required. There is no specific test to diagnosis IBS. To make a diagnosis of IBS your doctor should:

- Take a history
- Examine you
- Arrange routine and some specific blood tests

It is very important to exclude other gastrointestinal diseases which have completely different therapies.

Usually other investigations such as the following are required:

- Stool cultures
- Gastroscopy with small bowel biopsy
- Colonoscopy with biopsy and examination of the end of the small bowel (terminal ileum).

Other diseases that can mimic IBS include:

- Ulcerative colitis and Crohn’s disease
- Lactose intolerance
- Chronic parasitic infections
- Microscopic colitis
- Gastric and duodenal ulcers
- Diseases of the pancreas
- Coeliac disease

At the end of the above investigations you and your doctor should be confident of the diagnosis of IBS. There are many forms of treatment for IBS but there is no specific cure. Treatment is directed at

- Education about the cause of symptoms
- Modifying dietary triggers
- Other precipitating factors
- Treating specific symptoms

In almost all people this approach leads to a significant improvement in quality of life.