What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome with Diarrhea (IBS-D)?

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common chronic gastrointestinal disorder that involves problems with how the bowel moves digestive material through our intestines (motility) and how the brain interprets pain sensations in the bowel (sensitivity). Other than these issues of motility and sensitivity, there is no known cause for IBS. Those affected by IBS may experience recurrent abdominal pain, nausea, and irregular bowel patterns that are often painful. Symptoms are often chronic and intermittent and may last for months or years.

IBS affects between 10 and 20 percent of people in the developed world, about one-third of whom have IBS with diarrhea as the primary symptom, commonly referred to IBS-D. Most people with IBS-D experience frequent stools, and, on occasion, loss of bowel control. In fact, approximately 1 out of every 3 people with IBS-D have loss of bowel control or soiling. This has a strong, negative impact on day-to-day life, however these and other symptoms of IBS-D can be managed.

What causes IBS-D?

The causes of IBS-D are not distinct from those of IBS in general, and although the exact cause of IBS is unknown, it is believed that IBS may be caused by one of several factors:

- Brain-gut dysfunction: how the brain receives and processes sensations coming from the intestines. A malfunction may occur along the many different pathways that connect the brain and gut, interfering with the normal function of the intestines.
- Bacterial Infection: food poisoning, traveler’s diarrhea
- Surgery
- Food Sensitivity: allergies, change in diet
- Use of antibiotics or new medications: causing an imbalance of intestinal bacteria or a change in the body’s level of hormones
- Stress and anxiety: People who are stressed or depressed are more likely to have IBS. These feelings probably make symptoms worse, instead of causing them, because plenty of people have stress and no digestive problems. The exact connection isn’t clear.
- Heredity: Genetics can play a role in causing IBS. In fact, recent research has defined a genetic defect that causes a sub-set of IBS. However, this doesn’t mean that you need to have your genes manipulated. It means sorting out the cause of the problem and understanding the triggers.

What are the symptoms of IBS-D?

In addition to experiencing the common symptoms associated with IBS, such as, gas, heartburn, abdominal pain, and bloating, symptoms that are unique to IBS-D include:

- diarrhea or loose, watery stools, especially in the morning or after meals
- passing stools three or more times per day
- sudden urgency before bowel movements
- feeling of incomplete emptying after bowel movements
- abdominal pain or cramping
- nausea
- loss of bowel control or soiling yourself

How IBS-D is diagnosed?

Your physician will first review your medical history and conduct a physical examination. Utilizing IBS diagnostic algorithms, such as the Rome Foundation’s Diagnostic Criteria for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders and the Manning Criteria, your physician will then establish a diagnosis of IBS based on your symptoms. If diarrhea is predominant, then it is determined that you have IBS-D.
To rule out other infections, or if you have a family history of diseases such as, Celiac Disease, Crohn’s Disease, Ulcerative Colitis or colon cancer, your physician may order several tests. They may include blood, stool, imaging (colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, CT scan), and dietary tests.

**Treating IBS-D**

Treating IBS-D does not only involve the problems you are having with diarrhea. The goal is to address all your symptoms, including abdominal pain, gas, and bloating. To get relief from your IBS-D you will need to combine a few approaches, such as changes to your diet, over-the-counter (OTC) products and/or prescription medications. Although symptoms of IBS-D are not psychological in nature, stress can exacerbate symptoms, therefore finding ways to reduce stress is important. Your physician can help design a treatment plan that is right for you.

**Lifestyle and Diet:** Managing any type of IBS requires healthy lifestyle habits. This includes reducing stress, getting regular exercise, and getting adequate sleep. For those with IBS-D, dietary changes may be especially helpful. Here are some diet tips:

- Certain foods, such as milk, wheat, and red wine, are more likely to cause reactions. Smoking and caffeine consumption may also trigger IBS symptoms.
- Foods that produce gas, such as beans and specific vegetables

The following are dietary tips that may help alleviate some of the symptoms/pain of IBS-D. The CDHF does recommend you consult your doctor and/or a registered dietician.

- Drink plenty of water
- Probiotic supplements such as lactobacillus acidophilus or prebiotics may help alleviate IBS symptoms including abdominal pain, bloating, and bowel movement irregularity.
- A diet low in FODMAPs (fermentable oligo-saccharides, di-saccharides, mono-saccharides, and polyols), a group of short-chain carbohydrates, may help relieve symptoms. Consult your health-care professional for more information.
- Eating large meals also may trigger abdominal cramping and diarrhea. It’s best to eat smaller meals.
- Add fiber to the diet: Fiber theoretically expands the inside of the digestive tract, reducing the chance it will spasm as it transmits and digests food. Fiber also promotes regular bowel movements, which helps reduce constipation. Fiber should be added gradually, because it initially may worsen bloating and gassiness. If you have IBS-D, look for foods with more soluble fiber, the type that takes longer to digest (such as that found in oats, beans, barley, peas, apples, carrots, and citrus fruits).

**Diet Tips:**

Identify food triggers – Tracking foods you eat and logging the times you experienced symptoms/distress will help reveal connections between food and IBS-D. You should take detailed notes that should include the types and amounts of foods eaten and the time of consumption. It’s important to also record the time and description of distressing bowel events or related pain and discomfort.

The following food groups may be associated with a worsening of IBS symptoms:

- High-fat foods
- Dairy products
- Chocolate
- Alcohol
- Caffeinated drinks, such as coffee, tea, colas and energy drinks
- Sorbitol sweetener (found in some chewing gum)

**Lifestyle Tips**

Stress is considered one of the triggers of IBS symptoms. Here are some healthy habits that may also help reduce IBS symptoms.

- Exercise may help reduce stress.
- Smoking may worsen symptoms of the syndrome, it’s best to quit if smoking is a current habit.
- Get enough rest. This allows your body to maintain basic function, repair and manage stress.
- Use relaxation techniques: deep breathing, visualization, Yoga.
- Consult a professional trained in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy such as a counsellor or therapist.
Medication

While lifestyle and dietary changes can play a role in helping manage mild IBS-D symptoms, if your symptoms do not improve or even worsen, you may require further intervention. Over the Counter (OTC) and prescription therapies are available for treating IBS-D. OTC medications are recommended for short term/occasional use. If your symptoms are still unresolved, you should consult with your health care provider. With the right medication, you should find relief and prevent IBS-D from inhibiting your everyday activities and quality of life.

OTC therapies include:

Medication with the active ingredient bismuth subsalicylate. Researchers have found that it can help slow diarrhea. Some OTC medicines for gas relief, such as simethicone are generally safe.

Don’t take any OTC medicine for the long term without asking your doctor about it.

Prescription Drugs

IBS-D patients suffer from a multitude of symptoms including abdominal pain, bloating, and diarrhea.

The commonly used prescription drugs only address a single symptom rather than the constellation of symptoms observed in IBS-D patients. Recent advancements in the treatment of IBS have produced newer medications that not only treat the multiple symptoms but have been specifically studied and approved for use by Health Canada in IBS-D patients.

Physicians may now prescribe one or a combination of drugs that:

• reduce abdominal pain by blocking the pain signals to the brain
• relax the muscles in the gut to reduce diarrhea and the urgent, uncontrollable need to use the washroom (urgency)
• reduce both abdominal and bowel symptoms including pain, bloating, urgency and diarrhea

Your doctor can determine if a combination or a single treatment is right for you.

Risks associated with IBS-D

If left untreated, IBS-D can potentially lead to additional health complications. These include:

• Diarrhea may aggravate hemorrhoids in people who already have them.
• Eliminating many foods from the diet may result in a diet that is too limited in nutrients that could cause health problems.
• Stress and anxiety can result from the pain, and can impact a person’s daily life.

When to see a healthcare provider

It is important to see a healthcare provider if you do not find relief from persistent symptoms, have an on-going persistent change in bowel habits, or if new symptoms develop. It is important to have these investigated as they may be signs of a more serious condition.

Symptoms that may indicate a more serious condition include:

• Rectal bleeding
• Abdominal pain that progresses or occurs at night
• Weight loss

Preparing for your appointment

Good communication with your doctor is an important part of managing your digestive health, regardless of your diagnosis. To ensure that all doctors have the most accurate information about you, it’s a good idea to keep a journal in which you:

• Write down the symptoms that are bothering you, and how long you have had them.
• Write down key personal and medical information, including any recent changes or stressful events in your life.
• Jot down triggers (such as food, stress, activity, or menstrual cycle) that seem to make your symptoms worse
• Make a list of the medications you are taking, including the condition for taking them; this should include any non-prescription medications, probiotics or herbal preparations you may use. Also, note if any of your medications seem to affect your symptoms.
• Create a list of the health-related questions you would like your doctor to answer during your appointment.
If you have an iPhone or Android smartphone, you can easily track your symptoms and create reports for your doctor using the FREE CDHF Gi BodyGuard smartphone app.

**Partnering for best health**

Working collaboratively with your health care professional will help you protect your body from digestive diseases and maximize your digestive health. When you report your health status completely, concisely and accurately, your physician can provide you with the best care and treatment plan. Be sure to stay informed on ways to maintain your health and well-being, track and record your symptoms, and write down questions and concerns to discuss at your next appointment.

**Learn more about IBS**

The Canadian Digestive Health Foundation provides information, tools and support to help you take control your digestive heath with confidence and optimism. Visit www.CDHF.ca to view free recorded on-line seminars, read personal stories and access other helpful resources. Watch our information videos on:

Understanding Your Options: Managing Chronic Constipation
Dr. David Armstrong presents an informative and amusing overview of constipation. Watch and listen as he explains the constipation, its causes, tests you might need and available treatment options.
www.CDHF.ca/ManagingConstipation

Living Positively with IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome)
In this presentation, Dr. Stephen Vanner helps you better understand IBS, its symptoms, what IBS is not, factors that affect the syndrome, tests you may need and how to best manage your symptoms. Click here to watch the video.
www.CDHF.ca/LivingPositivelyIBS

**CDHF App helps track information**

The CDHF has developed a smart phone app for iPhone and Android called Gi BodyGuard to help you quickly, easily and privately track and share your digestive symptoms with your physician. Gi BodyGuard has a built-in symptom tracker (stool, pain, blood), food, fitness and medication trackers, a health history form and appointment/medication reminders. Using Gi BodyGuard is quick, easy and private.

As well, Gi BodyGuard lets you produce comprehensive reports so you can share important information with your physician during your next appointment. You can download Gi BodyGuard for free at: www.CDHF.ca/GiBodyGuard

The development of this fact guide was made possible through an unrestricted educational grant from Allergan.

Please note: The information contained in this digestive disorder guide is not a substitute for medical care and the advice of your physician. There may be variations in treatment that your physician may recommend based on your individual facts and circumstances. Always consult with your physician when you have concerns about your health.
YES! I want to donate to the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation

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[ ] Please send me information about protecting and improving
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Over 20 million Canadians suffer from
digestive disorders every year. The Canadian
Digestive Health Foundation believes this is
unnecessary and unacceptable.

We reduce suffering and improve quality of
life by empowering Canadians with trusted,
up to date, science-based information about
digestive health and disease.

As the Foundation of the Canadian
Association of Gastroenterology, we work
directly with leading physicians, scientists,
and other health care professionals to help
you understand and take control of your
digestive health with confidence and optimism.

Through research and public education, we aim to:

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the public and the generosity of our partners
to develop and deliver our programs. Please
consider including our Foundation as one of
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