

## **What Is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?**

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a chronic condition that impacts 10% of people throughout the world, and about 15% of the U.S. population, according to Johns Hopkins.

IBS is a chronic condition characterized by abdominal pain, bloating, visible mucus in the stool, feeling of urgency and changes in bowel movement including diarrhea, constipation, or both. Other symptoms of IBS, not related to the digestive system, may include headaches, sleep issues, pelvic pain, anxiety and/or depression.

It is not surprising then, that according to the American Gastroenterological Association, 72% of patients with IBS “don’t feel like themselves”, because of symptoms, and 69% of patients with IBS feel like “their symptoms prevent them from reaching their full potential”.

Research indicates that IBS interferes with the lives of patients about 11 days out of a month - IBS patients are more likely to miss school, work, time with family and time with friends.

This disease is hard to detect and hard to manage.

On the clinical side we don’t always understand what causes IBS - food poisoning or a traumatic event may trigger IBS, but an over- or underactive immune system or abnormalities in the digestive system may play a role as well. While there are medical treatments, lifestyle modifications and a highly personalized diet (increased fiber, probiotics) may help as well. Laxatives, stool softeners and an array of medications used for upset stomach may also be recommended, depending on symptoms of the disease.

On the patients' side, over 70% of individuals with IBS report difficulties with predicting symptoms and timing of flare ups. With that, over 70% of IBS patients report reduced engagement: they prefer to stay at home, they are afraid to plan things - out of the fear that symptoms will act up, and they avoid situations in which access to bathroom is limited (think outdoor picnics, concerts, sport games, hiking excursions etc). Since IBS may cause abdominal pain after eating - patients with IBS may also avoid restaurant outings and limit events in which food plays a major role (think July 4th, Holiday parties etc). While there is a lot of progress that has been made in the areas of management and treatment (including medications) of IBS, patients continue to struggle with persistent challenges, and this disease continues to impact their lives on a daily or almost-daily basis.

If you feel you are struggling with IBS, please make an appointment to discuss further with your Inspire primary care provider. If you have IBS and would like more personalized dietary advice, please schedule an appointment with our dietitian, [Agata Williams](#).

To learn more about IBS visit:

[www.youandibs.org](http://www.youandibs.org)

[www.gastro.org](http://www.gastro.org)