



Lifestyle changes can help control your symptoms

- Avoid foods that you know trigger your symptoms.
- See a dietitian to help you follow a short-term low-FODMAP diet.
- Learn how to manage stress – try yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, online courses or mindfulness apps.
- Increase your physical activity – being active helps your digestion.
- Consider counselling – the gut-brain link means that what is happening in your mind affects your gut and vice versa.

Try using an app on your phone to help you make these changes, including FODMAP and other IBS apps at www.healthify.nz



When to seek medical help

If you have any of the following warning signs or symptoms, do not assume it is irritable bowel syndrome. See your healthcare provider for a proper check.

- Unintentional or unexplained weight loss.
- Rectal bleeding not due to haemorrhoids (piles).
- Waking from sleep with pain or needing to use the toilet.
- Abdominal lump or mass.
- Family history of gastrointestinal cancer, inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis) or coeliac disease.
- Changes in bowel habits.

Your health is important



This information is sourced from the Healthify He Puna Waiora website, which offers easy to understand resources. **Healthify He Puna Waiora** is brought to you by the Health Navigator Charitable Trust.



IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

GUT HEALTH

Trouble going to the loo?



Get information on irritable bowel syndrome:
www.healthify.nz

What is irritable bowel syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common condition with symptoms including abdominal cramping, bloating, diarrhoea and constipation.

It can be uncomfortable but is usually harmless. It's important for your healthcare provider to rule out other conditions that could be confused with IBS, such as inflammatory bowel disease.

What causes IBS?

The exact cause of IBS is not certain. IBS may be caused by the nerves that tell your bowels how fast to remove waste. They also control pain by sending signals to your brain.

- **Nerves that are too active** can cause your bowels to remove poo too quickly (diarrhoea).
- **Nerves that aren't active enough** can allow poo to stay in your bowels too long (constipation).
- **Very sensitive nerves** may send too many pain signals to your brain, causing increased pain.

Other causes may be:

- **an imbalance of "good" and "bad" bacteria** in your gut;
- **an inflamed gut** allowing partially digested food and bacteria to leak through the gut wall;
- **infection**, such as a tummy bug.

What are the symptoms of IBS?

The most common symptoms of IBS are abdominal pain or discomfort, often reported as cramping, along with changes in your bowel habits.

Usually, your pain or discomfort will be associated with at least two of the following symptoms:

- **A change in frequency** of your bowel motions/poo.
- **Diarrhoea** – having loose, watery bowel motions three or more times a day, often with urgency.
- **Constipation** – having fewer than three bowel motions a week. During a bowel motion, poos can be hard, dry and small, making them difficult to pass and you may find it painful or need to strain.
- **Discomfort** that improves once you have had a bowel motion (poo).

➔ For a diagnosis of IBS, these symptoms must occur at least three times a month.

10 – 20%

of New Zealanders are affected by **irritable bowel syndrome**



How is IBS diagnosed?



Your healthcare provider will usually make a diagnosis based on your symptoms.

Because the symptoms of IBS are similar to those of other more serious conditions, you may need to have further tests.

What treatments are there for IBS?

There's no cure for IBS, but there are treatments that can help control your symptoms.

Treatment options include:

- Following a short-term low-FODMAP diet – three in four people's symptoms quickly improve on a short-term low-FODMAP diet.
- Reducing stress.
- Increasing physical activity.
- Taking probiotics.
- Taking medication if the lifestyle changes don't work for you.
- Having cognitive behavioural therapy – to reduce stress and help you manage your symptoms.