

Royal Hospital for
Sick Children

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)



Booklet 1:

Why does IBS happen?

Irritable bowel Syndrome (IBS)

What does 'irritable bowel syndrome' mean? Well, 'irritable' is often used as another word for being a bit bad tempered or cross. We know that everybody gets irritable now and again, including you, mums, dads, brothers, sisters, and teachers! This can happen for lots of different reasons. For example, when people have not had enough sleep or perhaps something has happened to annoy them.



Your intestines (also called bowels) can get irritable too, causing you to get a **sore tummy**, **bloating** (when your tummy feels quite swollen), **constipation** (when it's difficult to poo), and **diarrhoea** (when you poo a lot). When this has been happening a lot over quite a long period of time, your doctor might start to wonder if you have IBS.

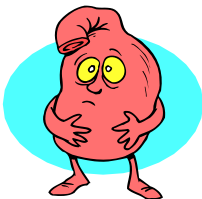
IBS is a common problem with the way the large intestine behaves. The large intestine (also called the colon) takes in water and nutrients (good chemicals) from the partly digested food that enters from the small intestine. Anything that is not absorbed is slowly moved on a pathway out of your body and forms what we call a poo, stool or bowel movement.

Out of every 100 children and young people, between five and 20 of them have IBS. Although IBS can cause difficulties, it is good to know that it doesn't lead to more serious problems, and it can be managed so that people are able to do all their daily activities.

Why do people get IBS?

No one really knows what causes IBS, although it can run in families. There is no test to diagnose IBS. Doctors often diagnose the problem just by listening to a person describe the symptoms. That's why it's **really important** for young people to talk with their parents and their doctor about their symptoms — even if it seems embarrassing.

Scientists think that the gut (your tummy and intestines) is in some ways similar to the brain.



This is because the gut has lots of excitable cells called neurons – just like the brain. Because of all these neurons, the gut can be affected by things that happen around us and by our feelings. We know that feelings such as being worried, excited or nervous can affect young people with IBS, and we think this is because the neurons respond to these feelings by speeding up your large intestine and slowing your stomach down. These feelings can therefore be a trigger for IBS.

Lots of things can cause people to feel worried, excited or nervous – maybe a young person has a test at school, a party they're looking forward to, or perhaps they are worrying about other people.

Because these feelings are linked to IBS, it is helpful to learn to manage them so that your symptoms don't get so bad, and you can learn about this in booklets 2 and 3.

What happens when an intestine gets 'irritable'?

To have a bowel movement, the muscles in the large intestine and the rest of the body have to work together. If this process is somehow interrupted, what's in the large intestine can't move along smoothly. It sort of stops and starts, doesn't move, or sometimes moves too fast. This can hurt and make you feel terrible. Doctors also think that people with IBS may have more

sensitive bowels, so what might cause a little soreness for one person, can cause a lot of pain for someone with IBS.

How is IBS treated?

Sometimes a doctor might give some medicine for IBS to help the pain, as well as manage wind, constipation, diarrhoea, and the need to rush to the toilet.

The best solution, however, is for people to learn what makes the symptoms worse, and avoid whatever it is. You can start by becoming a detective (along with your parents or carers) to try to work out what causes the IBS symptoms.

One way to do this is by keeping an IBS diary. For instance, you might want to record what you did and whether you had any IBS symptoms afterwards. You might also write down when you're feeling particularly worried, like before a big test, to see if that made the problems any worse. An example diary is given in the middle of this booklet, or you could make up your own.

We would be very grateful for your feedback on these booklets. Please visit:

www.surveymonkey.com/s/8Y9JSNP for parent or carers, or
www.surveymonkey.com/s/6DWST9M for young people

Many thanks.

Paediatric Psychology and Liaison Service,
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service,
3 Rillbank Terrace,
Royal Hospital for Sick Children
Edinburgh EH9 1LL

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