



## Lifestyle changes can help control your symptoms

- Try to eat more fibre and drink more fluids.
- Learn about an IBS diet and food plans.
- Read up about low FODMAP foods and diet.
- Learn to avoid symptom triggers and reduce stress.
- Develop techniques to help handle stress - counselling, yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, relaxation tapes and classes and acupuncture may help.
- Increase your level of physical activity – staying active helps digestion.



## 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 doctor for a proper check.

- Unintentional or unexplained weight loss.
- Rectal bleeding not due to haemorrhoids.
- 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 and your whānau's health is important

Information supplied by Health Navigator website, [healthnavigator.org.nz](http://healthnavigator.org.nz). Health Navigator Charitable Trust is a not-for-profit resource for the public and health professionals wanting trusted New Zealand health information. You can find more about irritable bowel syndrome on the website.

Visit our site  
[healthnavigator.org.nz](http://healthnavigator.org.nz)



## IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME GUT HEALTH

# Trouble going to the loo?



Get information on irritable bowel syndrome:  
[healthnavigator.org.nz](http://healthnavigator.org.nz)

## What is irritable bowel syndrome?

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

It can be uncomfortable but is usually harmless. It's important for your doctor 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 stem from a problem with the nerves controlling your bowels. These nerves tell your bowels how fast to remove waste. They also control pain by sending pain 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.

## 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:

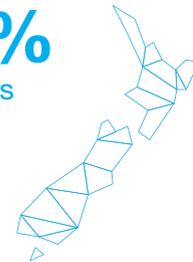
- **A change in frequency** of your bowel motions/poo.
- **Diarrhoea** – having loose, watery bowel motions three or more times a day, often with urgency.
- **Constipation** – having fewer than three bowel motions a week. During a bowel motion, poos can be hard, dry and small, making them difficult to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

➔ **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 doctor will usually make a diagnosis based on your symptoms.

However, the symptoms of IBS are similar to those of other more serious conditions. If there's uncertainty about whether you have a more serious problem or an infection, you may need to have further testing.

## What treatments are there for IBS?

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

**What you do day to day** – such as what you eat, your level of physical activity and how you manage stress – can make a big difference.

**Talking to your doctor about your concerns is also important.** A good relationship with your doctor can help you to find the best treatment for your symptoms. If lifestyle changes are not enough, your doctor may prescribe medication.

**You may want to talk to your GP about taking probiotics,** as they can help improve overall symptoms of IBS. Many dietitians and doctors who specialise in gastroenterology (tummy problems) now recommend a low FODMAP diet as a key part of a treatment plan for people with IBS.