



FROM
YOUR DOCTOR

Report the foods and beverages that give you trouble

Usually the most bothersome are . . .

- Milk and other dairy products
- Fatty foods
- Coffee, tea, and cola drinks containing caffeine
- Alcoholic beverages in excess
- Foods containing white flour
- Certain sugars
- Beans and peas
- Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts
- Sorbitol (a sweetener in diet foods and drinks, chewing gum, and candy).

Learning to cope with irritable bowel syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS, is a condition with symptoms such as cramps or pain in the abdomen, bloating, and diarrhea or constipation (or both at different times). Although IBS is certainly inconvenient, it isn't fatal. It doesn't shorten your life or require surgery. Having IBS doesn't increase your chances of getting bowel cancer or other serious diseases. IBS can be treated, often with better control of the unpleasant symptoms.

From time to time, your doctor may examine your abdomen and rectum. Or the doctor may in certain cases insert a sigmoidoscope, a flexible probe, into your lower intestine. Laboratory tests are usually required, and sometimes X-rays may be necessary.

To improve the chances that you and your doctor will successfully control your condition, it's important for you to do your part. Here are some suggestions:

- *Be patient* Progress with IBS often comes slowly over a period of months.
- *Explain your symptoms fully* Your doctor is interested in the kind of pain or cramping you have and its location. It's also important for you to tell about bloating, diarrhea, and constipation. The doctor will want to know what you see in the toilet bowl—size and firmness of stools, for example—how often you move your bowels, and if there's mucus attached. Headaches, muscle aches, and problems with urination should be reported. Women should report any symptoms that occur around the time of their period.
- *Describe the family history* Have any of your relatives had bowel cancer, inflammatory bowel disease, IBS, or similar disorders? Mentioning the bowel habits of parents, brothers, and sisters when you were growing

up may provide useful information.

- *List the medicines that you're taking* Be sure to include laxatives, antacids, and products you take for diarrhea, as well as prescription drugs. If you give yourself enemas, tell the doctor what kind and how often. The doctor may ask you to keep a record of the food you eat for a time. You may also be asked to avoid certain foods to see what effect it has on your symptoms.

- *Describe situations that trigger or worsen symptoms* Tell your doctor about difficulties at work, in your family, and elsewhere that seem to cause your symptoms or make them worse. Women sometimes experience IBS symptoms during their periods, and people who exercise may have symptoms when they try to do too much. In women, painful or difficult sexual intercourse may be another sign of IBS.

- *Follow instructions for medicines* Your doctor may prescribe drugs to reduce pain or reactions in your intestine or to calm your anxieties. Relaxation training or meditation may also reduce stress. You may be asked to take drugs for diarrhea or, if you're constipated, preparations containing fiber. Take only as much fiber as the doctor recommends, and be sure to drink plenty of fluids with it. You may be asked to cut down on the size of your meals.

- *Consider getting help from other sources* Your doctor may recommend seeing a gastroenterologist, dietitian, or other health care specialist. Write to the International Foundation for Bowel Dysfunction, and ask for pamphlets on IBS. The address is IFBD, Box 17864, Milwaukee, WI 53217. The organization also has local chapters in some cities. □