



## AWARENESS

# WHEN TO SUSPECT IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

**Do you have abdominal pain, that typically decreases after a bowel movement? And bloating, with gas? Constipation, diarrhoea, cramping?**

You might be suffering from Irritable Bowel Syndrome, or IBS – a fairly common disorder that affects the large intestine, according to the Mayo Clinic. While there's no definitive test to diagnose IBS, your doctor would conduct an examination and medical history to rule out other conditions.

### What to look for

The symptoms of IBS can vary, but they typically occur for a long time. Common symptoms include:

- Abdominal pain, cramping or bloating, related to a bowel movement.
- Changes in the appearance of the bowel movement.
- Changes in frequency to bowel movements.
- Diarrhoea or constipation, or sometimes both of these, alternating.
- Increased flatulence.
- Fatigue and difficulty sleeping.
- Anxiety and depression.

### Is there a cure?

Healthline report that if IBS is diagnosed, the treatment focuses on relieving the symptoms through changes to diet and lifestyle.

Exercise, drinking plenty of water, stress relief and dietary changes like following the low-FODMAPs diet can alleviate pain. Avoiding stimulants like caffeine, alcohol and sugary beverages can help, as well as taking probiotic supplements, to correct the 'good' bacteria balance in the gut.

### What is a low-FODMAPS diet?

FODMAP stands for fermentable oligo-, di-, monosaccharides and polyols, a scientific term for groups of carbs that trigger bloating, gas and stomach pain. The main sources of each are:

- Oligosaccharides: wheat, rye, legumes, garlic, onion
- Disaccharides: milk, yoghurt, soft cheese (lactose is the main carb)
- Monosaccharides: figs, mangoes, honey, agave nectar (fructose is the main cause)
- Polyols: blackberries, lychees, as well as some low-calorie sweeteners.

In a study published in the *European Journal of Nutrition*, IBS patients that avoided these foods showed an 81 per cent decrease in stomach pain, and a 75 per cent decrease in bloating. Unfortunately, not everyone with IBS responds to the diet, or manages to stick to it, as it is a three-stage process that can take up to six months. But if it does work, the diet could be life-changing for those suffering from IBS.