

April is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) Awareness Month.

Irritable bowel syndrome is a chronic condition that affects the large intestine. Signs and symptoms include cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, gas, diarrhea and constipation. Only a small number of people with irritable bowel syndrome have severe signs and symptoms.

Research suggests that about 12% of people in the U.S. have irritable bowel syndrome, including 5% of children 4 to 18, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

Many people have occasional signs and symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, but you're more likely to have the syndrome if you:

- **Are young**
Irritable bowel syndrome occurs more frequently in people under 50.
- **Are female**
In the U.S., irritable bowel syndrome is more common among women than men. Estrogen therapy before or after menopause also is a risk factor.
- **Have a family history of irritable bowel syndrome**
Genes may play a role, as may shared factors in a family's environment or a combination of genes and environment.
- **Have anxiety, depression or other mental health issues**
A history of sexual, physical or emotional abuse also might be a risk factor.

Diagnosis

There is no test to definitively diagnose IBS. Your health care provider is likely to start with a complete medical history, physical exam and tests to rule out other conditions, such as celiac disease and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).

Your provider will also likely assess whether you have other symptoms that might suggest another, more serious, condition. These include:

- Onset of symptoms after age 50
- Weight loss
- Rectal bleeding
- Fever
- Nausea or recurrent vomiting
- Belly pain, especially if it's not related to a bowel movement, or occurs at night
- Diarrhea that is ongoing or awakens you from sleep
- Anemia related to low iron

Additional tests

Your provider may recommend several tests, including stool studies to check for infection. Stool studies also can check to see if your intestine has trouble taking in nutrients. This is a disorder known as malabsorption. Additional tests may be recommended to rule out other causes of your symptoms.

Diagnostic procedures can include:

- **Colonoscopy.** Your provider uses a small, flexible tube to examine the entire length of the colon.
- **CT scan.** This test produces images of your abdomen and pelvis that might rule out other causes of your symptoms, especially if you have belly pain.
- **Upper endoscopy.** A long, flexible tube is inserted down your throat and into the esophagus, which is the tube connecting your mouth and stomach. A camera on the end of the tube allows your provider to view your upper digestive tract. During an endoscopy, a tissue sample (biopsy) may be collected. A sample of fluid may be collected to look for overgrowth of bacteria. An endoscopy may be recommended if celiac disease is suspected.

Laboratory tests can include:

- **Lactose intolerance tests.** Lactase is an enzyme you need to digest the sugar found in dairy products. If you don't produce lactase, you may have problems similar to those caused by IBS, including belly pain, gas and diarrhea. Your provider may order a breath test or ask you to remove milk and milk products from your diet for several weeks.
- **Breath test for bacterial overgrowth.** A breath test also can determine if you have bacterial overgrowth in your small intestine. Bacterial overgrowth is more common among people who have had bowel surgery or who have diabetes or some other disease that slows down digestion.
- **Stool tests.** Your stool might be examined for bacteria, parasites or the presence of bile acid. Bile acid is a digestive liquid produced in your liver.

If you have any of the signs/symptoms described above, see your doctor.

For more information, go to: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome/diagnosis-treatment/> or <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/consumer-health-what-is-ibs/> (The above information was excerpted from these two websites.)

To contact Diane or Glenn, parish nurses, you can leave a message for them at 540-662-3824.