

# Consumer Health: What is IBS?

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April is IBS Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn about irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS.

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.

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.

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.

Treatment for irritable bowel syndrome focuses on relieving symptoms so that you can live as normally as possible. Some people can control their symptoms by managing diet, lifestyle and stress. More [severe symptoms](#) can be treated with medication and counseling.

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