Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Do you struggle with bloating, constipation or diarrhea on a regular basis? If so, you may have irritable bowel syndrome, and you are not alone! It is estimated that 15% of Americans have irritable bowel syndrome, also called IBS. The good news is that there are some simple changes you can make to your lifestyle and eating habits that have the potential to dramatically improve your gut health and digestion.

The digestive tracts in people who have IBS react abnormally to certain substances or to stress. This reaction is what leads to symptoms such as abdominal pain, gas, bloating, constipation and diarrhea. IBS is sometimes called spastic colon, and you may notice it seems to flare up at times (most commonly during increased stress) and other times symptoms seem to go away. IBS is not a disease. IBS is a term used for a group of symptoms that occur together. Much research has been conducted on IBS, but the cause is still not fully known. Some possible factors are:

- Smoking, eating certain foods, drinking alcohol and caffeinated drinks can trigger IBS symptoms.
- A problem with the nerves or muscles in the digestive tract
- Certain bacteria found after a severe gastrointestinal infection in the small intestine and colon
- Stress and anxiety

Medicine can’t cure IBS, but it may help manage the symptoms. It may help your digestive tract work better. Your health care practitioner may also suggest some lifestyle changes to help control your IBS. You might need to change your diet and learn to better manage stress. Yoga and mindfulness have been shown to ease IBS symptoms. Johns Hopkins Medicine employees can practice mindfulness every Monday at noon during the Mindful Monday meet-up — details can be found on the Healthy at Hopkins portal calendar. If your health care practitioner advises diet changes, it may be helpful to talk with a dietitian, who can help you maintain a healthy nutritional balance in your food intake while keeping your gut in a happier place.

Ask the Expert

May 16 at noon

Join a 30-minute Ask the Expert session with Ekta Gupta, associate professor of gastroenterology, to learn how to keep your gut healthy and happy.

Click here to join the meeting.

Success Story

Devin Brown, Service Representative
Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital

After smoking for more than 20 years, I chose to quit! I have been smoke free for over a month, and I am now advocating that it’s possible. I have replaced smoking with walking, journaling, reading. I have an unbelievable support system with my friend circle, which is my family. They have kept me motivated in putting down the nicotine and keeping it that way! And my department at work is really thriving together on Ramp Health and participating in all it has to offer. We are having a healthy competition to have fun and keep morale up.

Click here to view the Worksite Wellness Menu and request an event.