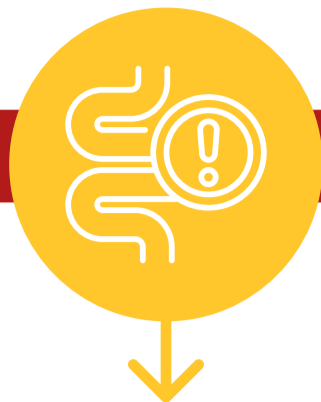


IBS in Women



Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common but complex condition that affects the digestive tract, and it is nearly twice as common in women as in men.

Understand how your body works to better manage symptoms and reclaim your quality of life.

Key Factors of IBS in Women



- **Anatomical differences**
Research shows that women's colons are slightly longer than men's, contributing to constipation. Women's colons also seem to empty more slowly, which may lead to bloating.
- **Hormonal influences**
Many women report that their symptoms flare or change during their menstrual cycle, as estrogen and progesterone levels fluctuate.
- **The nervous system**
The gut is closely connected to the nervous system. When nerves in the digestive system become overly sensitive, the gut may overreact to gas or stool, causing pain.
- **Environmental factors**
Early-life stress or severe bouts of stomach infections can trigger IBS symptoms.

Decoding the Signals

IBS symptoms can last weeks to months and often include:



Abdominal pain or cramping



Bloating and gas



Changes in bowel movements



Mucus in stool



Nausea

When It's Not Just IBS

IBS is diagnosed based on symptoms, so it can be confused with other conditions, such as:



- **Endometriosis**, a condition where tissue grows outside the uterus and causes intense abdominal and pelvic pain
- **Celiac disease**, an immune reaction to gluten that can cause bloating, pain and diarrhea
- **Fibromyalgia and interstitial cystitis**, chronic conditions that may be associated with IBS in women
- **Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)**, including Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, which can cause diarrhea, constipation and stomach pain
- **Lactose intolerance**, or the inability to digest milk sugars, which can cause gas and diarrhea

Empower Your Gut

While there is no cure, most women can relieve symptoms with:



- **Dietary adjustments**
Eat high-fiber foods, limit hard-to-digest carbohydrates and avoid triggers, such as dairy, caffeine and carbonated drinks.
- **Stress management**
Cognitive behavioral therapy and deep breathing can reduce flares.
- **Supplements and medicines**
Your doctor may recommend over-the-counter fiber supplements, antidiarrheals or prescription medications.
- **Regular routines**
Exercising, drinking plenty of water and getting quality sleep can help regulate bowel function.

You don't have to navigate the discomfort and frustration of IBS alone. To find a provider who understands the unique needs of women's digestive health, visit weillcornell.org/doctors