

## Dealing With Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)



We all have stomachaches and trouble going to the bathroom once in a while, but for people with IBS, the chronic pain and discomfort can be disabling. Along with abdominal cramping and discomfort, IBS symptoms may include Bloating, Gas, Constipation (the stool comes out either lumpy or hard), Diarrhea (the stool comes out loose or watery), Alternating bouts of constipation and diarrhea, Bowel movements that feel uncontrollably urgent, difficult to pass, or incomplete and Clear or white mucus with the stool.

**To determine whether your digestive problems are truly IBS, doctors need to see two out of the following three features:**

1. A bowel movement relieves the ache and suffering
2. There's a change in how often the stool comes out
3. The stool looks different

The standard diagnostic guideline for IBS, called the Rome IV criteria, requires that you have these symptoms for at least 1 day a week in the last 3 months and that symptoms started at least six months prior. But most doctors don't follow that requirement closely, says Philip Schoenfeld, MD, MS Ed, MSc. He is co-author of the American College of Gastroenterology's IBS treatment guidelines.

Schoenfeld says it's tough for patients to remember the exact number of weeks they had symptoms in the preceding year. He suggests that people not wait. Instead, see a doctor whenever you have recurrent symptoms.

Doctors can determine whether your symptoms are IBS or signs of another problem. IBS is often confused with other illnesses, so doctors will need to ask questions and perform tests to confirm a diagnosis.

Blood in the stool, fever, weight loss, and continuing pain are NOT symptoms of IBS. If you have these symptoms, SEE A DOCTOR RIGHT AWAY.