

Intestinal Bowel Syndrome (IBS)?

of symptoms and not a disease. This is why it is called a syndrome. muscles of the bowel.

Symptoms of IBS vary from person to person and come and go with attacks lasting from days to months. The following symptoms may be present:

- Abdominal pain often relieved by having a bowel movement or passing wind.
- Bloating or a feeling of fullness
- Wind
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Irregular bowel movements which alternate between diarrhoea and constipation.

Note: Blood in the stool is not a symptom of IBS. If you notice this, consult your doctor as soon as possible.

What causes IBS?

The cause of IBS is not known. What is known is that individuals with IBS have an oversensitive bowel. The bowel is a muscular tube that propels food from the stomach to the anus. It breaks down and digests food by waves of muscular contractions. In IBS, the muscle is hypersensitive and the rhythm of contractions is easily upset; too fast and it may cause diarrhoea, too slow and there can be constipation. Waves of fierce contractions can produce the colicky abdominal pain frequently associated with IBS.

Who suffers from IBS?

IBS is the most common disorder of the digestive tract and is second only to the common cold as a leading cause of absenteeism from work due to illness. It is estimated that approximately 15 to 20% of the population has IBS. It can occur at any age but symptoms are more likely to start before the age of 40. IBS is twice as common in females and symptoms may be worse at certain times of the menstrual cycle.

How is it diagnosed?

There is no specific test for IBS, so your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and probably carry out a physical examination as well as some routine tests. These tests may include:

- **Sigmoidoscopy:** examination of the lower bowel and rectum using a small flexible tube inserted through the rectum.
- **Colonoscopy:** examination of the large bowel under sedation using a thin flexible instrument.

Additional tests may include blood tests and a barium enema. It is important to understand that many of these tests are arranged to rule out other disorders. If you have IBS the results of all of these tests will be normal.

What triggers attacks?

Many people find that attacks of IBS come and go. Other people find that attacks can be brought on by factors such as stress, diet or infection. It is important that you examine your lifestyle and diet to see if there are factors which bring on attacks so that you and your doctor can plan your treatment. These are some of the things to consider:

- Stress can produce symptoms as the over-sensitive bowel may react excessively to stress. If your symptoms become worse as a result of stress, look for ways to reduce stress or techniques such as meditation to help you cope with stress.
- Meals can make symptoms worse because the digestion of food normally stimulates the bowel. You may find that certain foods bring on symptoms. Lack of fibre or too much fat, sugar and alcohol can also bring on symptoms. Intolerance to milk can also aggravate IBS.
- Gastroenteritis or a bowel infection can also trigger symptoms because an infection can cause the bowel to become oversensitive. Symptoms may persist long after the infection has cleared.
- Some medicines can affect the bowel and cause symptoms such as constipation and diarrhoea. These include iron tablets, pain killers, antibiotics, laxatives, antacids and others.

What treatment is available for IBS?

There is no cure for IBS but you can do a lot to help yourself. The treatment for IBS is based on reducing the symptoms, as there is no specific treatment for IBS. A detailed history of your symptoms and the factors which aggravate your symptoms are important so your doctor can advise a treatment plan designed especially for you. If your doctor's first suggestion doesn't bring relief, persevere as another could work.

Sometimes trial and error is the only way to discover what is best for you. Your treatment will likely be based on the following:

- Reassurance that your symptoms are not serious and can be controlled.

your symptoms so they can be avoided through diet and lifestyle
cope with stress.
ing fibre, fluid, exercise and perhaps bulking agents.
hoenal drugs such as Diareze.
nd spasm with antispasmodic agents such as Mintec.

What is Mintec?

Mintec capsules contain peppermint oil, which is a natural, herbal antispasmodic agent.

Mintec acts directly on the bowel causing the bowel muscle to relax. This action helps stop or reduce the spasm that causes the abdominal pain.

Many recent clinical studies have proven that Mintec is an effective natural agent for the treatment of abdominal pain, bloating, wind, cramps and spasm associated with IBS.

How does Mintec work?

Mintec capsules are specially coated so that they pass through the stomach and the first part of the bowel intact.

This delays the release of the peppermint oil until the capsule reaches the part of the bowel that is causing the symptoms.

Mintec acts directly to relax the muscle of the bowel. This in turn decreases the amount of air trapped in the bowel and may relieve abdominal bloating and wind as well as the urgency of bowel movements.

Unlike other agents which your doctor may prescribe to treat abdominal pain, Mintec acts only on the muscles of the bowel and does not affect the rest of the body. This means that Mintec is unlikely to cause unpleasant side effects such as dry mouth, dizziness and blurred vision.

Mintec is available from your pharmacist without a prescription.

How to take Mintec

Mintec should be taken only by adults. The usual dose is one capsule taken three times a day. It is best taken immediately before a meal with water.

Do not take Mintec after a meal or with a hot drink.

The capsules should be swallowed whole. Do not break or chew capsule, as the special coating on the capsules will be damaged. This will result in the peppermint oil being released in your mouth and throat which could cause irritation.

If your symptoms are particularly severe, your doctor may recommend that you increase the dose of Mintec to two capsules three times a day. You should take Mintec until your symptoms improve.

Side Effects

Mintec may cause heartburn. If you develop this symptom, stop taking Mintec and ask your doctor for advice. Although it is rare, allergy to peppermint oil has been reported.

If you develop any other unusual symptoms while taking Mintec, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

Precautions

If you already suffer from heartburn, Mintec may make this symptom worse.

Mintec is not recommended for use during pregnancy or for use in children, except on the advice of a doctor.

Further information

There are a number of groups that can supply additional information to sufferers of IBS:

- The Australian Gastroenterology Institute, 145 Macquarie St, Sydney NSW 2000.
- The Gut Foundation, C/- The Gastrointestinal Unit, Prince of Wales Hospital, High St, Randwick NSW 2031.
- The Irritable Bowel Support Association of Australia, PO Box 5044, Manly QLD 4179.