

# Males with IBS report more social stress than females, study finds

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One of the few studies to examine gender differences among patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) has found that males with the condition experience more interpersonal difficulties than do females with the condition. The findings challenge what had been predicted by the University at Buffalo investigator and his colleagues. The study, "Understanding gender differences in IBS: the role of stress from the social environment," is being presented during the Oct. 19 poster session at the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) annual meeting in Philadelphia.

The research, featured on ACG's [blog](#), was selected as a Presidential Poster session, which recognizes highly novel and significant research; the designation is given to less than 5 percent of the more than 2,000 abstracts being exhibited.

"Our findings underscore the significance of studying gender-based differences in how people experience the same disease or condition," says Jeffrey Lackner, PsyD, professor of medicine in the UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

IBS is among the most common, disabling and intractable gastrointestinal disorders. Symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhea and/or constipation. It is estimated to affect between 25 million and 50 million Americans. Because IBS is twice as common among women as men, far less is known about how men experience the disease.

The UB study revealed little difference between genders in the severity of their gastrointestinal symptoms.

Previous psychological research findings had suggested that males with IBS take on stereotypically feminine traits, including passive and accommodating behaviors, according to Lackner and his co-authors.

But the UB study has found that [males](#) report feeling cold and detached, and as though they have a need to dominate their relationships with others. Males, not females, report having more difficulties in interpersonal relationships.

"That discrepancy underscores our need to move beyond clinical intuition and anecdote, and systematically study the different ways that each gender experiences disease in general," says Lackner.

The findings may have relevance to the ways that male IBS patients interact with their doctors, he says. "Patients who have a domineering and distant interpersonal style may need to work more closely with the physicians," says Lackner.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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