

Expert explains how inflammatory bowel disease, irritable bowel syndrome differ

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Receiving a medical diagnosis can be difficult. You may only hear parts of the conversation as you start to think about what treatment will be needed and how this will affect your daily life. It can be especially

challenging when different diseases have names that sound similar, such as inflammatory bowel disease, or IBD, and irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS. Daisy Batista, M.D., a gastroenterologist at Mayo Clinic Health System-La Crosse, explains the difference between the two diseases.

Inflammatory bowel disease is a group of autoimmune diseases that include [ulcerative colitis](#) and Crohn's disease. In inflammatory bowel disease, the [immune system](#) attacks the bowel and causes inflammation, Dr. Batista says.

"Inflammatory bowel disease may be triggered by a combination of a genetic predisposition and an illness or exposure to something in your environment that causes the immune system to attack the bowel and create inflammation," Dr. Batista says. "There are two peak times for diagnosis in adults: people in their early 20s to 30s and people in their 50s and 60s."

Common symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease are:

- Diarrhea
- Rectal bleeding
- Bloating
- Occasional constipation
- Gas
- Urgent bowel movements
- Cramping abdominal pain

Symptoms of [inflammatory bowel disease](#) may be experienced regularly and can significantly affect quality of life, Dr. Batista says. Treatment typically involves using [immunosuppressive drugs](#) to help the immune system avoid attacking the bowel. Changes in diet can decrease inflammation.

People who have symptoms should tell their [health care provider](#), Dr. Batista says, adding that there is no need to feel embarrassed.

Irritable bowel syndrome is a bowel disorder that causes digestive organs to look normal but not function normally. For most people, [irritable bowel syndrome](#) is a chronic condition that can fluctuate from mild to [severe symptoms](#), and sometimes symptoms disappear, Dr. Batista says.

While irritable bowel syndrome can affect almost anyone, there are risk factors. Those who are young, female, have a family history of the disease, or have a history of anxiety or depression are at higher risk, Dr. Batista says.

While irritable bowel syndrome cannot be cured, it does not permanently harm the intestines, she says.

"Irritable bowel syndrome may affect your quality of life, so it is important to learn about your symptoms and what you can do to control them," Dr. Batista says.

The current understanding of irritable bowel syndrome suggests hypersensitivity in the gut causes the symptoms. This affects how the body perceives stimuli related to bowel function. Treatment focuses on relieving symptoms so people with the disease can live as normally as possible, Dr. Batista says.

In most cases, mild symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome can be controlled by learning to manage stress and making healthy changes to diet and lifestyle. This includes exercising regularly, drinking plenty of fluids and getting enough sleep. Your health care team may prescribe other specific dietary changes, medications and supplementary treatments.

"While living with irritable bowel syndrome can present daily challenges, your health care team is available to help," Dr. Batista says. "They can guide you through an appropriate evaluation of your symptoms and provide treatments to help you optimize your quality of life."

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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