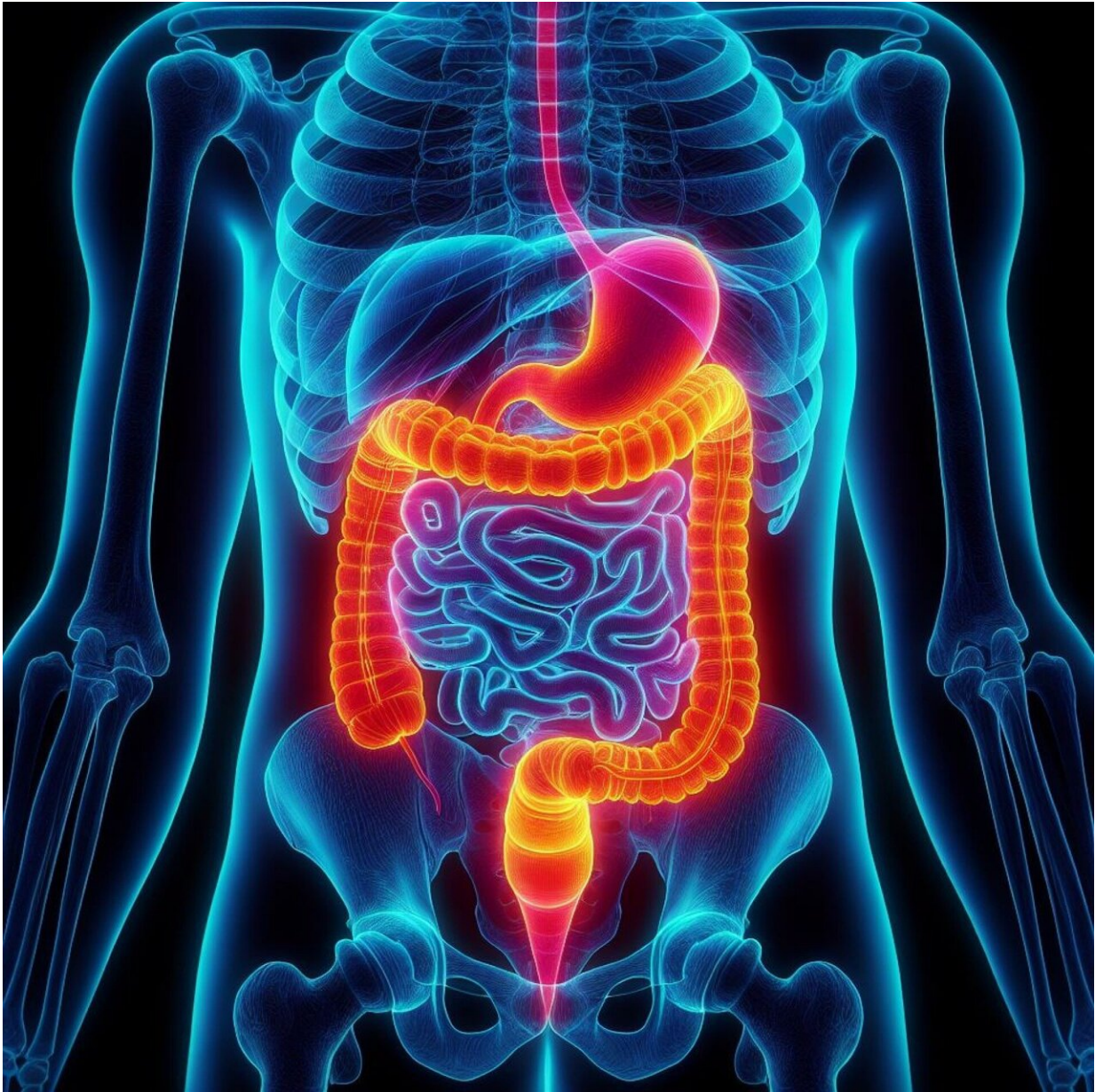


Know the signs of irritable bowel syndrome

April 26 2024, by Laurel Kelly, Mayo Clinic News Network



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April is IBS Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn about the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS.

Research suggests that about 12% of people in the U.S. have [irritable bowel syndrome](#), and it's more common among women than men and in people younger than 50, according to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

Irritable bowel syndrome is a chronic condition that affects the large intestine. Even though the digestive tract looks normal, it doesn't function as it should. Normally, the muscles in the intestines that move food from the stomach to the rectum contract and relax in a gentle rhythm that moves the food along in a fairly predictable schedule. But with irritable bowel syndrome, the muscles in the intestines spasm, making the contractions longer and stronger than normal. Those spasms are painful, and they disrupt the movement of food through the intestines.

Signs and symptoms

Only a small number of people with irritable bowel syndrome have [severe symptoms](#). Some people can control their symptoms by managing diet, lifestyle and stress. More severe symptoms can be treated with medication and counseling.

Symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome vary, but the most common include:

- Abdominal pain, cramping or bloating that is related to passing a bowel movement
- Changes in appearance of bowel movement

- Changes in how often you are having a bowel movement
- Sensation of incomplete evacuation
- Increased gas
- Mucus in the stool

Risk factors

Many people have occasional signs and symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, but you're more likely to have the syndrome if you:

- Are young. Irritable bowel syndrome occurs more frequently in people under 50.
- Are female. In the U.S., irritable bowel syndrome is more common among women than men. Estrogen therapy before or after menopause also is a risk factor.
- Have a family history of irritable bowel syndrome. Genes may play a role, as may shared factors in a family's environment or a combination of genes and environment.
- Have anxiety, depression or other mental health issues. A history of sexual, physical or [emotional abuse](#) also might be a risk factor.

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Citation: Know the signs of irritable bowel syndrome (2024, April 26) retrieved 22 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-bowel-syndrome.html>

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