

Criteria for IBS Diagnosis

To diagnose irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), your doctor likely uses a set of criteria like the Rome III criteria to distinguish IBS from other intestinal problems. You'll meet the Rome III criteria for IBS if your symptoms began at least six months ago, you have had abdominal pain or discomfort at least three days each month in the last three months, and at least two of the following statements are true:

- The pain or discomfort is relieved by having a bowel movement.
- The pain or discomfort is linked to a change in how often you have a bowel movement.
- The pain or discomfort is linked to a change in the appearance or consistency of your stool.

The presence of any of the following symptoms supports a diagnosis of IBS.^{1,2} "When you have IBS, your pattern of bowel movements may be different over time. Two or more of the following may happen:

- Bowel movements may occur either more often (diarrhea) or less often (constipation) than usual, such as having more than three bowel movements a day or less than three a week.

- Bowel movements may differ in size or consistency (may be hard and pelletlike, pencil-thin, or loose and watery).
- The way stools pass changes. You may strain, feel an urgent need to have a bowel movement, or feel that you haven't completely passed a stool.
- You may have bloating or a feeling of gas in the intestines."¹

In addition to these criteria, a detailed history, physical examination, and limited [diagnostic tests](#) (such as stool sampling tests, blood tests, and x-rays)³ can help confirm the diagnosis of IBS.² There is no individual test that can diagnose IBS for certain.⁴ The diagnosis of IBS relies on excluding other things that could be causing your symptoms.⁵ Your doctor may suggest further tests, such as endoscopic procedures (e.g., [sigmoidoscopy](#) or [colonoscopy](#)),³ to rule out other conditions, but recent updates in guidelines for diagnosing IBS only suggest these additional tests if "alarm" or "red flag" symptoms exist,⁶ which may suggest another condition or disease is present. Red-flag symptoms include:

- onset of IBS-type symptoms after age 50,
- unexplained weight loss,
- bleeding,
- fever,
- recurrent vomiting,
- persistent severe pain,
- anemia, and/or
- family history of inflammatory bowel disease or colon cancer.^{7, 8, 9}

If diarrhea is present with your IBS symptoms, a blood test for Celiac disease is recommended.¹⁰ "Celiac disease is a lifelong (chronic) condition in which foods that contain gluten – a form of protein found in some grains, notably wheat, barley, and rye – damage the small intestine, making it unable to properly absorb nutrients. Celiac disease may cause



symptoms similar to IBS symptoms.”¹¹ Patients with IBS symptoms should also be screened for lactose intolerance. “Lactose intolerance is a condition in which a person experiences digestive symptoms following the consumption of a dairy product.” “Lactose intolerance is caused by an insufficient amount of a digestive enzyme called ‘lactase.’ The enzyme lactase is produced in the lining of the small intestine and needs to be present in order to digest lactose, a type of sugar found in dairy products. It is the inability to digest lactose that leads to the unpleasant digestive symptoms of lactose intolerance”¹² – similar to the symptoms of IBS.

Sources

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