

## - Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

## WELLNESS

## NATURAL FIXES

# Ease Your IBS

Try these holistic approaches to find relief for tummy troubles.

BY MADELEINE HAASE

**F**or some people, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is an uncomfortable and sometimes embarrassing inconvenience. For others, the symptoms (and the stress surrounding them) can be extremely painful and derail an entire day—or month. Upward of 15% of people may struggle with IBS, and anyone can be affected.

IBS can take a few different forms: You may predominantly have diarrhea (IBS-D), constipation (IBS-C), or a combination (IBS-mixed), along with symptoms such as abdominal pain and bloating. What makes IBS different from the occasional unsettled stomach is how common such symptoms as cramping, bloating, and abnormal bowel movements become. Plus, if you're dealing with a lot of stress, IBS symptoms can get worse.

## TREATMENTS TO TRY

Patients can get relief from IBS symptoms, but this can take weeks to months, says Andrew Boxer, M.D., of Gastroenterology Associates of New Jersey. "Relief can come from changes in diet, exercise, sleep patterns, and medications." In addition, three non-medication treatments Dr. Boxer supports are described below.

### PEPPERMINT OIL

This essential oil can help relax the muscles of the GI tract, studies have found. That can help relieve stomach cramps, bloating, and diarrhea. You can consume peppermint oil safely by taking one or two drops at a time or sipping peppermint tea. If you take peppermint oil orally, be aware that heartburn and nausea are possible side effects. Before taking peppermint oil supplements, be sure to talk to your doctor about all the ingredients that may be in the capsules.

### HYPNOTHERAPY

Research shows that hypnotherapy can activate the



## **BIOFEEDBACK**

With the help of a trained practitioner, this mind-body therapy uses sensors to measure bodily functions so you can learn techniques to change them. Studies have shown that biofeedback for IBS may help people have more control over their pelvic floor muscles, which can help in achieving more complete bowel movements, says Dr. Boxer, and this can be useful for constipation-predominant IBS, or IBS-C.

parasympathetic nervous system, which relaxes the body; this can improve IBS symptoms. The practice involves progressive relaxation, then soothing imagery and sensations focused on IBS symptoms. Clinical hypnotherapists can often be found at medical centers, or you can search via the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis at [asch.net](http://asch.net). You can also try using an app such as Nerva, which offers hypnotherapy techniques meant to help “fix” the miscommunication between the gut and the brain.

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### **WHEN SHOULD YOU SEE A DOCTOR?**

■ Weight loss, diarrhea at night, bloody stool, fever, vomiting, and pain without relief are issues to talk to a doctor about right away. Also, if you lose your appetite or have extreme nausea, ask your doctor how to get your eating habits back on track.