




Common myths about IBS




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Causes of IBS



IBS is due to food allergy.



IBS is a purely psychological condition.

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There are many misconceptions around the causes of IBS, which are important to address:

- IBS is due to food allergy – FALSE, although food intolerance (non-IgE mediated) may be a contributing factor for some patients
- IBS is a purely psychological condition – FALSE. There are also physiological components

Causes of IBS



Bloating indicates an intestinal blockage or weight gain.



All IBS sufferers have a history of physical or emotional abuse.

- Bloating (a feeling of excess gas) or distension (a physical increase in abdominal girth) in IBS patients indicates intestinal blockage or weight gain – FALSE; bloating and distension are thought to be due to multiple mechanisms, including abnormal gas handling and visceral sensory dysfunction¹
- All IBS sufferers have a history of physical or emotional abuse – FALSE. While a history of abuse may contribute to the development of functional disease in a minority of patients, it is a myth that all patients with IBS have suffered physical or emotional abuse

1. Agrawal A, Whorwell PJ. Review article: abdominal bloating and distension in functional gastrointestinal disorders – epidemiology and exploration of possible mechanisms. *Alimentary Pharmacology and Therapeutics* 2008; **27**: 2-10.

Causes of IBS



Stress can exacerbate IBS symptoms.



Constipation can be caused by medicines.

However, some common conceptions about IBS are true:

- Stress can exacerbate IBS symptoms – TRUE
- Medicines can cause constipation – TRUE, e.g. codeine

Consequences of IBS



IBS is an early indicator of IBD.



IBS can cause cancer.

There are also misconceptions around the consequences of IBS, such as:

- IBS is an early indicator of inflammatory bowel disease – FALSE
- IBS can lead to cancer – FALSE


Consequences of IBS




Constipation causes 'autointoxication'.

- Constipation causes 'autointoxication', whereby toxic substances are absorbed into the body from stools – FALSE

IBS treatment



Long-term laxative use can lead to addiction.



Antidepressants used for IBS affect mood.

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Patients may also worry about IBS treatments. Myths include:

- Long-term laxative use is unhealthy/can lead to addiction – FALSE
- Antidepressants used in IBS affect mood – FALSE

Patients may initially be wary of taking antidepressants for IBS because they believe that they affect mood and are addictive. However, at low doses (typically <50mg), antidepressants may help to reduce pain perception without affecting mood.¹ It is important to highlight this to patients to encourage compliance.

1. BSG guidelines: Spiller R, Aziz Q, Creed F, Emmanuel A, Houghton L, Hungin P, *et al.* Guidelines on the irritable bowel syndrome: mechanisms and practical management. *Gut* 2007; **56**: 1770-1798.