

## **Irritable bowel syndrome**

Irritable bowel syndrome will affect an estimated one in five of the population at some time in their life. Women are three times more likely than men to suffer.

Diagnosis tends to be by exclusion and should be confirmed by a qualified medical practitioner. Symptoms include one or all other following: abdominal pain; bloating; diarrhoea; constipation; excessive wind, changed stools and rectal discomfort.

Patients who complain of dark stools or the presence of blood in them, weight loss, or anaemia like symptoms should be referred immediately to their doctor.

Stress and food ingestion are often the main triggers of IBS, but change in diet or an infection may precipitate an episode. However, IBS may develop some time after the triggering agent has been eliminated from the body.

Patients should be treated sympathetically. The subject can be embarrassing and many may feel their GP considers them a nuisance with such 'trivial' symptoms.

Treatment can include dietary changes such as increasing dietary fibre or by eliminating foods that cause wind or loose stools. Exercise may also benefit the patient, especially if they are complaining of trapped gas or constipation.

Treatment includes peppermint oil which has carminative and antispasmodic action. Alverine and the anti-muscarinic hyoscine are antispasmodics that relax smooth muscle.