

# Irritable bowel syndrome cases among youth on the rise

*This Year, The World Gastroenterology Organisation's Annual World Digestive Health Day Today Will Focus On The Syndrome*

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**Pune:** Twenty-three-year old Amrit Gehlot lives with continuous fear of an 'unplanned attack'. It has restricted him from going out with family and friends and nearly ruined his social life.

It started with abdominal pain, constipation, and the feeling of incompleteness. Gradually it became worse. Later, he was diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

Doctors say there is a gradual increase among young patients, in the age group of 22-40 years, seeking medical help for IBS. The reasons, they say, are mainly stress and lifestyle disorders.

"It began during a very stressful time in my life and progressed slowly starting with discomfort, constipation, and the feeling of incompleteness. As I began college, it became worse. I had to map out the closest bathroom to my classes. The thought of leaving home for more than two hours would disturb me," said Gehlot, who is presently undergoing treatment for IBS.

Gastroenterologist Shabeer Kayamkhani said that there is a gradual increase in number of patients complaining of IBS. "In 2006, almost 25 per cent of all my patients who complained of abdominal pain and altered bowel habits like constipation or diarrhoea, were diagnosed to be suffering from IBS. Today, this incidence has gone up to 30 per cent. Interestingly young patients in the age group of 22-40 years are often seen seeking medical help for IBS," said Kayamkhani.

Elaborating further, Kayamkhani said, "The gradual rise in IBS especially among young patients, is mainly due to increased stress and lifestyle disorders."

Explaining the symptoms, Kayamkhani said, "The most common symptoms of IBS are abdominal pain or discomfort often reported as cramping, bloating, gas, diarrhoea and constipation. IBS affects the colon, or large bowel, which is the part of the digestive tract that stores stool."

Sharing the same view, gastroenterologist Vinay Thorat says, "IBS is not

a disease, it's a functional disorder. Meaning that the bowel doesn't work or function correctly."

Elaborating on its causative factors; Thorat said, "The nerves and muscles in the bowel appear to be extra sensitive in people with IBS. Muscles may contract too much when such a patient consumes. These irregular contractions can cause cramping and diarrhoea during or shortly after a meal."

Comparing IBS with other gastrointestinal problems like inflam-



matory bowels syndrome and Crohn's disease, Thorat said, "Normally an IBS patient will not lose weight as well as will not pass blood in the stool. If something like this happens, then it could be something else like inflammatory bowels syndrome and Crohn's disease. It is not IBS then."

Fatty foods, milk products, chocolate, alcohol, and caffeinated and carbonated drinks can trigger symptoms. "Eating foods with fibre and having small meals throughout the day may reduce symptoms. Treatment for IBS includes medicine, stress relief, and changes in eating habits," said Thorat.

Suggesting a few simple steps to monitor triggers, Kayamkhani said, "It is advisable to keep a diary that tracks what you eat during the day, what symptoms you have, what foods make you feel sick etc." Take these notes to the doctor to see if certain foods trigger your symptoms or make them worse. If so, you should avoid eating these foods or eat less of them. "Fibre may reduce constipation associated with IBS because it makes stool soft and easier to pass," said Thorat.

On the role played by stress in IBS, Kayamkhani said, "Emotional stress does not cause IBS, but people with IBS may have their bowels react more to stress. So, if you already have IBS, stress can make your symptoms worse."

Suggesting a few tips, Thorat said, "Learning to reduce stress can help with IBS. With less stress, you may find you have less cramping it easier to manage your symptoms. Meditation, exercise, hypnosis, and counselling may help. You may need to try different activities to see what works best for you. Alternative therapies like Yoga, meditation and relaxation technique are often found very helpful and beneficial."

"The diagnosis of IBS is mainly clinical and based on symptoms. The other diagnostic tests available are often too expensive and unnecessary. That's the reason that a gastroenterologist primarily makes diagnosis of IBS based on his clinical experience," said Kayamkhani. IBS doesn't damage the bowel or lead to other health problems, he added.

## IBS is mainly diagnosed based on symptoms

- Alternating constipation and diarrhoea
- Pain in abdomen
- Pain precedes or accompanies bowel movement
- No satisfaction after bowel evacuation
- Passing mucus
- Pain worsen after meals
- Feeling of bloating or fullness throughout the day.
- Abdominal discomfort vanishes after satisfactory bowel movement
- Bowel movement begins soon after solids and liquids are ingested

## The following are not symptoms of IBS

- Blood in stools or urine
- Pain and diarrhoea that interrupts sleep
- Weight loss