



The Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland (ACPGBI) is a group of 1000+ surgeons, nurses, and allied health professionals who advance the knowledge and treatment of bowel diseases in Britain and Ireland.

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IBD or IBS?

Patient information

Conditions that cause inflammation of the intestines, such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, are known as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). This shouldn't be confused with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which is a different condition and requires different non-surgical treatment. However, some people with IBD can also have IBS.

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)

IBD is a term mainly used to describe two conditions, ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

Both ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease are long-term (chronic) conditions that involve inflammation of the gut (gastrointestinal tract). Ulcerative colitis only affects the colon (large intestine), while Crohn's disease can affect all of the digestive system, from the mouth to the anus.

It's sometimes difficult to tell the difference between the two main types of IBD. If this is the case, it's known as indeterminate colitis.

There are other, less common types of IBD called collagenous colitis and lymphocytic colitis. The inflammation can only be seen using a microscope, and so they're known as microscopic colitis.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

IBS is a common, long-term condition of the digestive system. It can cause bouts of stomach cramps, bloating, diarrhoea and/or constipation.

The symptoms vary between individuals and affect some people more severely than others. They tend to come and go in periods lasting a few days to a few months at a time, often during times of stress or after eating certain foods.

You may find some of the symptoms of IBS ease after going to the toilet and opening your bowels.

IBS is thought to affect up to one in five people at some point in their life, and it usually first develops when a person is between 20 and 30 years of age. Around twice as many women are affected as men.

The condition is often lifelong, although it may improve over several years.