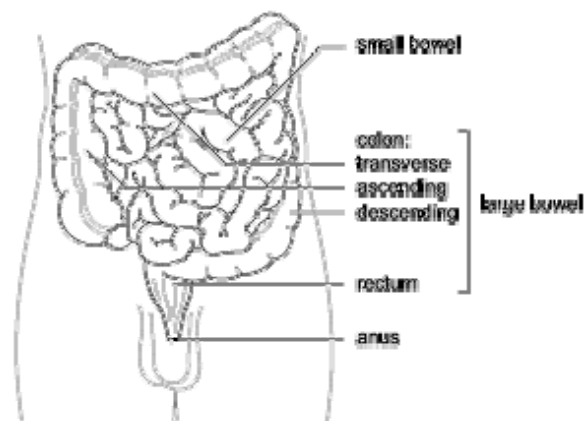




Irritable Bowel Syndrome

What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is an uncomfortable but not dangerous condition affecting the small or large bowel. It is diagnosed when no other cause can be found for these symptoms, such as an ulcer, coeliac disease, lactose intolerance, inflammation of the bowel or infection.



What are the symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Common symptoms are constipation, diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, wind and bloating.

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

How common is it?

Symptoms of irritable bowel are quite common (perhaps up to 20% of the population).



What causes Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

The exact cause of IBS is not known. It is termed a functional disorder, which means that the way the bowel works is affected, but medical tests find no physical abnormalities that might explain the symptoms.

Symptoms are thought to be caused by muscle contractions in the bowel wall. These are generally more frequent and stronger in people with IBS. The contractions may be most troublesome after food and in stressful situations. Intolerance of specific foods (such as tea, coffee and dairy products) may trigger the symptoms.

IBS sometimes develops after a bout of gastroenteritis, an inflammation of the stomach and bowel linings which causes sickness and diarrhoea. Gastroenteritis may be caused by food poisoning, or by infection with a bacteria or virus.

There is growing evidence that parasites play a major role in IBS symptoms. Unfortunately, parasites are commonly underdiagnosed in IBS patients because they are not recognised by the majority of doctors as a cause of digestive problems so stool ("poo") samples are not tested properly. The common belief that parasites are only a problem in underdeveloped countries is not true.

IF YOU HAVE AN UNRESOLVING MEDICAL PROBLEM AND YOUR DOCTOR CAN'T FIND A REASON, IT MIGHT BE CAUSED BY A PARASITE!

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

What are intestinal parasites?

Intestinal parasites are organisms that live within the intestinal tract, growing and feeding off your body. They range from visible worms (like tapeworms and pinworms) to microscopic organisms such as *Giardia lamblia*.

What are the symptoms of a parasite infection?

Many symptoms of a parasitic infection are similar to other conditions such as IBS making it particularly important to test for parasites for proper diagnosis and treatment. The most common symptoms are diarrhoea, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, gas, bloating, foul-smelling stools, anorexia or weight loss, gastritis, fever and chills, headache, constipation, blood or mucus in stools, and fatigue.

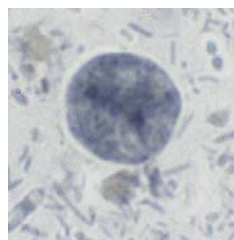
How do you get parasites?

Parasites are found in raw and undercooked food and in treated and untreated water. They can be transmitted by insects and household pets and can be passed on from person to person through unsanitary habits and poor hygiene.

Parasites travel in different ways. For example, the microorganism *Giardia*, which causes persistent diarrhoea, fever, cramps and other symptoms, is contained in faeces (poo). It gets into public water supplies when animal or human sewage contaminates the water source. It can also be transmitted from person to person through poor hygiene. Other parasites are found in raw, rare or undercooked meats and fish, while others are in contaminated soil.

Dientamoeba fragilis and *Blastocystis hominis* are the most common parasites found in Australia when proper testing is performed. Detection rates around the world vary from 1-19%. In our laboratory, the rate of detection of *Dientamoeba fragilis* is approximately 7% and for *Blastocystis hominis* it is approximately 15% with some apparent seasonal variation.

Studies have also shown that when these parasites are deliberately looked for, a significant number of people with IBS have one, or both of these parasites.



Dientamoeba fragilis



Blastocystis hominis

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

How can I tell if I have parasites?

A comprehensive parasite test, using a stool sample analysed by a laboratory specialising in parasite testing, is the most effective way to diagnose this type of infection. Stool testing can miss parasites if specific collection and testing methods are not used.

Proper testing for parasites

Most large pathology laboratories do not specifically look for all parasites. In fact, to detect the most common parasites including *Dientamoeba fragilis* a special fixative must be supplied. If parasite testing is performed on a sample which has not been mixed with a fixative liquid at the time of collection, it is unlikely to be adequate.

Histopath Pathology is a specialist NATA accredited gastrointestinal laboratory and provides comprehensive testing for all intestinal parasites. The laboratory provides a stool collection kit which includes three containers of a special fixative. The fixative will preserve parasites. Without fixation, some parasites, particularly *Dientamoeba fragilis* will degrade very quickly and become undetectable on microscopy.

Collection of three specimens is recommended, after which, the patient should return the specimen to the referring Doctor for collection by our courier. Alternatively, specimens may be returned directly to the laboratory.

Faecal collection kits for parasite testing, including collection instructions, can be supplied free of charge by Histopath.

For convenience, kits which include jars for bacterial culture and other tests, are also available.



Faecal collection kit supplied by
Histopath

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

How much does the Comprehensive Parasite Analysis cost?

Medicare rebates apply with all tests performed at the laboratory and bulk billing is available, providing a referral form is completed by your Doctor.

How do you treat parasites?

Eliminating the parasitic infection using antibiotics is the key to relieving the symptoms of infection, or the parasites will continue to grow and reproduce. Some parasites are resistant to common antibiotics and consultation with a medical practitioner experienced in the treatment of parasites may be required. There are many reports of patients becoming free of their IBS type symptoms following successful eradication of parasites.

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