Is Nausea a Symptom of IBS?

by EMMI SCOTT

IBS and Nausea

Nausea is one of the most disruptive symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Feeling nauseous can make you want to stay in bed and keep you from going about your day as planned.

Nausea can be described as queasiness or an upset stomach. For patients with IBS, nausea-induced vomiting isn't common, but it can occur.

Keep reading to learn about the causes of IBS-related nausea, as well as how to prevent and treat it.

Common Causes of Nausea with IBS

Nausea is a fairly common symptom for people with IBS. In a UCLA study of patients with IBS, about 40 percent of women and 30 percent of men participating in the study reported nausea.

For people with IBS, feelings of nausea can be traced back to a few root causes. They include stress, eating problem foods, concurrent conditions, and medication.

Stress and Anxiety

Nausea is one of the body's natural reactions to stress. When you experience something that makes you feel anxious, the brain releases serotonin.

Your stomach contains serotonin receptors. It reacts, often through feelings of nausea, to signal that something is wrong.

This is important to help you stay alert when you are in a dangerous situation.

But when you experience frequent or chronic stress and anxiety, your nausea response to serotonin can become disruptive.

Many people who have IBS also suffer from anxiety and depression. Some studies have suggested that those with IBS may have a more sensitive digestive system, especially when it comes to stress.

Eating Problem Foods

Some individuals experience nausea after eating specific foods. If you have allergies to foods like nuts, eggs or shellfish, you may have an immune response when eating them.

Nausea may be one result of your body launching histamine and other chemicals to fight off these foods.

Surprisingly, gas can also cause nausea. It might help to avoid gas-causing foods like these:

- Legumes
- Cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli
- Dairy
- Sugar
- Fatty foods
- Garlic

Concurrent Conditions

People with IBS often have other conditions that overlap with irritable bowel syndrome.

Nausea is frequently a symptom of these other conditions. They include:

- Functional dyspepsia
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), which also causes heartburn
- Migraine headaches

It is important to find the cause of your nausea to be able to treat it effectively. If you visit your doctor, make sure to report all of your conditions to facilitate finding a solution to your nausea.

Medications

Sometimes medications, even those used to treat other IBS symptoms, cause nausea. Some medications that can cause nausea include:

- Antibiotics
- Antidepressants
- Aspirin
- Birth control pills
- Lubiprostone, which is used to treat constipation-type IBS
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, like ibuprofen

If your doctor has prescribed a medication that is causing nausea, consult them before making any changes. They may be able to suggest another type of medication that doesn’t have nausea as a side effect.

Preventing and Treating Nausea

There are many possibilities for the causes of nausea. But once you know where your nausea is coming from, it becomes easier to treat and prevent it.

Stress Management

If you believe that your nausea is related to stress, learning how to decrease stress and manage anxiety will keep you from feeling chronically nauseous.

Stress management techniques include mindfulness, meditation, and journaling. Exercise and time spent outside are also useful. As long as you do something that you enjoy, relaxing will have a positive effect on your wellbeing.

If you are struggling with chronic stress or anxiety, you may want to consult a mental health professional, such as a psychologist. They can employ techniques to help you work through and manage your stress. This will allow you to feel healthier, both emotionally and physically.

Meal Tracking

In case your nausea is caused by trigger foods, you may want to try tracking your meals.

Using a notebook, app, or spreadsheet, write down the times of your meals and what you eat. You can also record how you feel physically and emotionally throughout the day to make connections between your symptoms and foods you consume.

If you find that you frequently feel nauseous after eating a specific food, try avoiding that food for a set period of time with an IBS elimination diet to see if you continue to experience nausea.

Treating Other Conditions

If you have a medical condition besides IBS, make sure to treat it with care and consistency. Although it can be easy to assume that nausea is related to IBS because of its connection to the digestive system, the cause may lie somewhere else.

Medications

If you experience frequent and intense nausea, you may want to consult your doctor about using medication to treat it. Many available prescription medications specifically target nausea.

Natural Remedies

Some people prefer using natural remedies to treat nausea. You may want to try ginger, milk thistle, or digestive bitters. Before deciding an herbal remedy, consult with your doctor to make sure that they won’t negatively interact with any medications you are taking.

Regardless of the cause of your nausea, there are many options for treating it. And once you are finding the right one, you can get back to feeling like yourself.