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# IBS Vs. Other Digestive Disorders: How To Tell The Difference

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Digestive disorders are confusing, particularly when so many of their symptoms overlap. Individuals and general medical providers sometimes struggle to differentiate between conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), celiac disease, and food intolerances. Getting a correct diagnosis is the first step to managing symptoms effectively and avoiding unnecessary restrictions or treatments.

## IBS vs. IBD: Understanding the Key Differences

While IBS and IBD might sound similar, they're [very different](#). IBS is a functional disorder; it affects how the digestive system works without causing any physical damage. It's annoying, with bloating, cramping, diarrhea, and constipation, but it doesn't lead to long-lasting harm.

On the flip side, IBD includes conditions like Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. These involve chronic inflammation, leading to ulcers and malnutrition, and require

ongoing medical care. The silver lining with IBD is that it's easier to diagnose than IBS.

## IBS vs. Celiac Disease

Celiac disease brings its own set of [challenges](#). It's an autoimmune condition where the body reacts to gluten. Similar to IBS, people with celiac experience bloating, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. However, it comes with additional complications like malabsorption, weight loss, and anemia, which affect long-term health. Celiac disease can be confirmed through blood tests or biopsies, while IBS is diagnosed based on symptoms and ruling out other possible issues.

## IBS vs. Food Intolerances

People often [confuse](#) food intolerances, like those to lactose or fructose, with IBS. While both cause stomach issues, food intolerances happen when the body has difficulty digesting certain foods. Symptoms usually go away if those foods are avoided. IBS isn't linked to one specific trigger, and its symptoms vary over time. A hydrogen breath test or an elimination diet can help diagnose food intolerance, while providers rely on symptom-based criteria for IBS diagnosis.

## When to See a GI Specialist

Unexpected weight loss, rectal bleeding, ongoing pain, or a family history of digestive problems are reasons to get checked out by a specialist. If digestive issues aren't improving even after diet and lifestyle changes, a gastroenterologist is the best bet to determine what's going on and develop a plan to manage it.

## Diagnostic Tests for IBS and Other Conditions

Each condition requires unique testing. Diagnosing IBS involves using the Rome IV criteria, which examines symptom patterns over time. IBD needs more in-depth testing, such as a colonoscopy or stool markers. For celiac disease, antibody blood tests and biopsies are required for confirmation. When it comes to food intolerances, breath tests or elimination diets are the easiest way to identify the

It's important to remember the differences between conditions to make the best health choices. IBS affects how your gut functions but doesn't cause any physical harm. IBD involves inflammation that can damage your digestive tract. Celiac disease is a reaction to gluten that harms the small intestine. Food intolerances lead to temporary discomfort after eating certain foods but don't cause lasting damage.

If you're experiencing ongoing digestive problems, contact a GI Alliance gastroenterologist and start on the road to relief.

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