Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a disorder of the gastrointestinal tract that causes a variety of abdominal symptoms including; gas, bloating, cramping, diarrhea and/or constipation, and change in bowel habits. It usually occurs in people under the age of 45. Most people can relate the onset of their IBS to major life stressors or changes such as: academic pressures, moving or starting a new school, death of a loved one, etc. Some people first notice their symptoms after abdominal surgery or shortly after recovering from a gastrointestinal infection. Certain foods may also trigger onset of symptoms for an individual who is sensitive (sensitivity to foods varies from individual to individual).

**What is the Cause of IBS?**
The cause is unknown, but stress, abnormal contraction of the intestines and diet may all be contributory.

**Caution**-
If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, check with your physician to rule out any other problems and for a definitive diagnosis.

**How is IBS Treated?**
IBS is generally best managed through a combination of lifestyle changes which include stress reduction and medication. Treatment is based upon the severity of symptoms and the individual’s response.

Stress Reduction may include: medication, massage therapy, yoga, relaxation therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) (see a CAPS counselor for more information on CBT and stress management).

**Lifestyle Changes**

**Diet**
- Eating small frequent meals, chewing your food well and eating in a relaxed environment will help aid in digestion.
- Eat slowly so that you avoid swallowing a lot of air which can increase the bloated/gassy feeling.
- To prevent constipation and stimulate development of healthy microbiota (good bacteria) in the gut, include fiber from a variety of natural sources including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, oats and beans. The goal is roughly 25-30 grams of fiber per day. Increase fiber intake slowly to avoid abdominal discomfort.
- Drink more fluids to help combat constipation.
- Avoid any food that irritates or causes gas.
- If you are lactose intolerant, avoid standard milk products; look for Lactaid products or use Lactaid caplets or drops with dairy.
- Individuals will vary according to their tolerance of one food over another; but some find caffeine, fat, alcoholic beverages, spicy foods, foods with added fiber like chicory or inulin and sorbitol (and other sugar alcohols found in lite foods)—worsen symptoms.
- Regular exercise helps relieve stress and stimulates normal contraction of your gastrointestinal tract.

**Medications**, if indicated, will be managed by your healthcare provider. They may include:
- Antidiarrheal medication for the treatment of diarrhea predominant symptoms.
- Antispasmodic medication for the treatment of gas and bloating.
- Antidepressant medication which is used to treat pain and bloating.