

The Great Imitators of IBS: Diagnoses that Fool the Scope

IBS Subtype	IBS Imitator	Diagnostic finding (clinical flags)	Endoscopy clues	Key Histology
IBS-D	Crohn's	Family hx, perianal disease, weight loss, EIM	Colon can be normal, was ileoscopy ± enteroscopy performed?	Focal cryptitis, non-caseating granulomas, transmural aggregates
IBS-D/M/C	Celiac	Autoimmune comorbidities, Fe-def anemia, dermatitis herpetiformis	Duodenum could look normal. Was ≥6 duodenal biopsies done?	Villous atrophy, crypt hyperplasia, ↑ IELs
IBS-D	Microscopic colitis	Watery diarrhea in middle-aged women; normal colonoscopy	Hidden in plain sight! Colon will be normal, was right & left colon biopsies done?	↑ IELs or subepithelial collagen band
IBS-D	Ulcerative colitis	Bloody diarrhea, urgency, rectal pain, EIM	Continuous colitis from rectum	Mucosal-only inflammation, crypt abscesses
IBS-M	Colon cancer	Lynch/family hx, occult blood, Fe-def anemia, wt loss	Was there a thorough right-side exam, excellent prep? If not, re-look.	Invasive adenocarcinoma, adjacent dysplasia
IBS-D	Disaccharidase deficiencies	Post-prandial bloating/diarrhea since childhood; triggered by dairy/sweets/starch	Normal duodenum/jejunum but need to biopsy, freeze and send for analysis!	Normal villi; ↓ enzyme on biopsy assay
IBS-D/M/C	Chronic infections (Giardia)	Travel/wilderness water exposure; foul diarrhea and bloating	Colon will be normal & if stool analysis not done then EGD to perform duodenal biopsy	Trophozoites on mucosa, mild villus blunting
IBS-D/M/C	Chronic Atrophic Gastritis (autoimmune type → hypochlorhydria)	Fe & B12 deficiency, pernicious anemia, early satiety/bloating	Body & antrum biopsies to map the stomach! Litmus ph test of gastric aspirate.	Parietal-cell loss, intestinal metaplasia
IBS-D	Exocrine pancreatic insufficiency	Steatorrhea, wt loss, diabetes/alcohol hx; ↓ fecal elastase	EUS ± FNA of pancreas	Acinar atrophy, dense fibrosis, chronic inflammation
IBS-D	Bile-acid malabsorption (ileal disease)	Watery diarrhea post-ileal resection/Crohns/NSAIDs; Bile Acid Binder Trial	Colon will be normal, was ileum examined?	Chronic active ileitis, villus blunting, ± granulomas