

Diet and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

What is irritable bowel syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome is used to describe a group of gut symptoms. The symptoms can include fluctuating abdominal pain, discomfort or bloating which are associated with altered bowel habits.

For a diagnosis of IBS to be confirmed, your doctor will do tests to exclude other conditions such as coeliac disease or inflammatory bowel disease.

It is important to remember that symptoms may vary from one person to another and can also change over time.

Some people experience diarrhoea symptoms (IBS-D), others experience constipation (IBS-C), while others can alternate between diarrhoea and constipation (IBS-M).

How can I manage my symptoms?

General dietary tips

- Eat regular meals and snacks.
- Include at least eight cups of water or non-caffeinated fluids per day (including herbal teas).
- Make home-cooked food with fresh ingredients where possible.
- Limit alcohol intake to no more than two standard drinks per day, with two alcohol-free days per week.
- Limit caffeine intake to less than three cups per day (including tea, coffee and cola).
- Limit intake of soft drinks.
- Limit intake of rich or fatty foods (including chips, fast food, and fatty meats such as burgers and sausages).
- Limit intake of spicy food.

Lifestyle tips

- Take your time when eating meals - sit down, eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Enjoy sharing meals with friends and family.
- Exercise regularly (for example, walking, swimming, or cycling). Check with your doctor if you have not been exercising regularly for some time.
- Make time to relax and reduce stress where possible.
- Keep a food and symptom diary to see which foods are helping or worsening symptoms.

Management of wind and bloating

- Reduce gas-producing foods such as beans, pulses, brussels sprouts, cauliflower and sugar-free mints/chewing gum.
- Try adding flaxseeds/linseeds (up to one tablespoon/day) to other foods such as yoghurt, cereals, porridge, casseroles, soups and salads.

Management of diarrhoea

- Limit caffeine from drinks such as tea, coffee and soft drinks.
- Reduce sugar-free or diet products that contain sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol (such as diet soft drinks, mints and gum).
- Replace lost fluids by drinking enough throughout the day.
- Limit rich and fatty foods as these can sometimes worsen symptoms.

Management of constipation

- Adequate fluid can help improve stool frequency and make it easier for stools to pass.
- Include a wide variety of high fibre foods, for example oats and oat bran, brown rice, wholemeal or wholegrain bread, wholegrain pasta or couscous, potatoes with skin, quinoa, linseed, fruits and vegetables.

Role of probiotics

- Probiotic supplements, yoghurts, or fermented milk drinks may have a role in reducing IBS symptoms. If you choose to try them, probiotics should be taken daily for at least four weeks. If they do not appear to be effective you may consider another brand or ceasing the supplement altogether.

Further advice

- Dietary and lifestyle changes can often help IBS, however if your symptoms persist after following these strategies then try to reintroduce the foods you have removed.
- You may ask your doctor to refer you to an Accredited Practising Dietitian who can further assist you with IBS dietary management. In some circumstances the dietitian may suggest you trial a diet low in short chain fermentable carbohydrates (low FODMAP diet). The dietitian can ensure your diet is nutritionally adequate while following a diet such as this.
- Stress and mood can also negatively impact gut symptoms. Talk to your doctor if you are experiencing problems with stress or mood.

Food and symptom diary

Intake (Time/food/amount)	Symptoms (Bloating, distention, gas, pain and location, bowel movements)
BREAKFAST 	
MORNING TEA 	
LUNCH 	
AFTERNOON TEA 	
DINNER 	
SUPPER 	

For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist: _____

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