

# Dietary advice for patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) affects about 10 - 20% of the population. It is more common in people between the ages of 20-30; however it is seen in older people.

Although symptoms may vary from person to person they usually include:

- abdominal pain and cramping,
- passing mucus,
- feeling that symptoms are worse after eating,
- bloating with more or less wind than normal,
- Constipation and/or diarrhoea.

These symptoms are thought to be due to an increased sensitivity of the bowel, which results in spasm of the bowel muscle.

## You must tell your doctor if you have the following symptoms:-

- Unintentional and unexplained weight loss;
- rectal bleeding;
- a family history of bowel or ovarian cancer;
- or if you are over 60 years old, a change in bowel habits to looser and/or more frequent stools for more than 6 weeks.

Before attempting to manage symptoms via your diet, it is important to rule out other medical conditions, and to have a diagnosis established by your doctor or healthcare professional.

## Managing your IBS symptoms

### Stage 1:

The stresses of life have now been identified as a contributing factor in IBS.

Leisure time is invaluable to enable relaxation. Exercises such as gentle walking/swimming can be helpful in reducing stress.

Relaxation tapes may also help. These are normally available at music shops or for loan at public libraries.

Allowing time for eating is essential – if you rush your food, grab a snack on the run or skip meals – it is little wonder your bowel complains!

### Is there any medication to help?

Medication to help relieve muscle spasm and help reduce stress can be effective in helping to control symptoms of IBS that perhaps have not responded to diet and lifestyle changes. Talk to your GP if you feel medication may help you.

You may be prescribed bulking agents containing isphagula to help relieve constipation and/or antispasmodic drugs to help relieve muscular spasms.

### Dietary advice

A few changes to your diet could help to ease the discomfort you are experiencing and settle your bowel muscle. Although modifying the diet may not be a cure, give your bowels time to adjust to any changes that you make.

# Healthy eating

It is important to eat a healthy balanced diet (as shown in the plate picture below).



## **Breads/ rice/ potatoes/ cereals/ pasta**

- Plan your meals/ snacks around starchy foods such as bread, chapattis, breakfast cereals, potatoes, rice, noodles, oats, pasta etc.
- Choose high fibre varieties where possible e.g. wholemeal bread, high fibre cereal (wholegrain wheat), wholemeal pasta, skins on potatoes.
- Aim to include one food from this group at each meal time - these foods should provide the bulk of your meal.

## **Fruit and Vegetables**

- Have at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Remember that fresh, frozen, dried, canned and juiced fruit and vegetables all count towards your five a day.
- Eat a variety of different types and colours of fruit and vegetables.

## **Meat, fish, eggs and beans**

- Choose moderate amounts of lean meat, fish, eggs and pulses such as beans and lentils.
- Remove the skin from chicken, excess fat from meat and avoid frying.
- Try to include two portions of fish each week, one of which should be an oily fish (e.g. mackerel, trout, sardines, kippers, and fresh tuna).

## **Milk and dairy foods**

- Aim for 3 portions of dairy foods per day. A portion is 1/3 pint of milk, a small pot of yogurt or a small (matchbox size) piece of cheese.
- Try to choose reduced fat versions where you can, e.g. semi skimmed or skimmed milk, "diet" or "light" yogurts, Edam, cottage cheese and half fat Cheddar.

## **Limit your intake of foods containing fat and sugar**

- Choose low fat or reduced sugar foods where possible.
- When using a spreading fat, choose one that is high in monounsaturated fatty acids, e.g. spreads made from olive oil or rapeseed oil.

## **Do not miss meals or eat late at night**

By eating at least 3 times a day you will stimulate the muscle in your gut to contract and move the food along the gut.

If the measures in stage 1 do not help reduce your symptoms, more dietary changes may be necessary. Different changes help different symptoms.

## **Stage 2:**

See which symptoms on the following pages match your own and try the recommended changes.

## **If your main symptom is Constipation:**

### **1. Consider fibre intake**

Try to gradually increase the fibre content of your diet. Introduce no more than one extra portion over a two day period.

### **Choose whole grains:-**

- Breads – wholemeal, oat bran, high fibre white; whole wheat versions of muffin, scone, crumpet, pitta, chapatti.
- Cereals – "wheat", "bran" or "oat" cereals.
- Biscuits – digestive, hobnobs, oat cakes, fig rolls.
- Cakes – fruit cake, flap jack, fruit malt loaf.
- Whole wheat pasta.
- Brown rice.
- Potatoes with their skins on – jacket, boiled, chipped or roast wedges.

## Vegetables, salads and fruit:-

- Fresh, canned or frozen; raw, cooked, stewed or dried.

Fibre intake should be adjusted according to its effect and reduced if necessary.

## 2. Consider fluid intake

With the increase in fibre, you need more fluids to help make your stools soft and easy to pass. Fibre acts like a sponge and absorbs fluid. Drink at least 8 cups of fluid per day (1½-2 litres), preferably water, squash or herbal teas.

## 3. Oats and golden linseeds

(See glossary below) Take up to 1 tbsp per day, these soften the stools and make them easier to pass.

### If your main symptom is Diarrhoea:

- Replace lost fluids by drinking at least 8 cups of water or non-caffeinated drinks – for example, herbal teas or sugar-free squash.
- Limit your intake of fizzy drinks.
- Try not to have alcohol every day and when you do, have no more than two units a day.
- Restrict intake of caffeinated drinks (for example, tea, coffee or cola) to three cups a day.
- Limit insoluble fibre intake from wholegrain breads, bran, cereals, nuts and seeds (except golden linseeds).
- Avoid skin, pips and pith from fruit and vegetables.
- Limit fresh and dried fruit to three portions a day and fruit juice to one small glass a day. Make up the recommended five a day with vegetables.
- Limit your intake of foods high in resistant starches (see glossary below).
- Avoid sugar-free sweets (such as mints and gum) and food products containing sorbitol.

- Trial live 'probiotic' yoghurts (see glossary below).
- Diarrhoea may also be caused by a high intake of fatty foods. Avoid foods high in fat, such as chips, fast foods, burgers and sausages, crisps and cakes. Try low fat versions.

### If your main symptoms are wind and/or bloating:

- Limit fruit to 3 portions a day (including up to 1 portion of dried fruit) and fruit juice to 1 small glass a day. Remember to make up the recommended 5 a day with vegetables.
- Try reducing your intake of resistant starches (see glossary below).
- Oats and golden linseeds (see glossary below) may also help with symptoms of wind and bloating.
- You may wish to try 'probiotics' (see glossary below).

### Stage 3:

If after making and maintaining these recommended changes to your diet for 4 to 6 weeks, your symptoms have not improved, contact your dietitian to make an appointment.

Because IBS symptoms are often worse after eating, it is not surprising that food is blamed. True food allergies are rare and are unlikely to cause IBS.

However, IBS symptoms could be caused by food intolerance.

**There is no convincing evidence to support any of the commercially available food intolerance tests.**

Intolerance to foods can only be tested by trying an elimination or exclusion diet. This should be done under the supervision of a dietitian.

Restricting your diet unnecessarily, and without consulting your dietitian, could make your diet unbalanced and mean that you miss out on important vitamins and minerals.

Keeping a “Food Diary” of your symptoms and food intake on a daily basis may be useful in trying to identify possible food intolerances.

## Glossary of Terms

### Probiotic yoghurt:

These are yoghurts, supplements or fermented milk drinks which contain bacteria found naturally within the gut.

If you wish take them daily for at least one month at the dose recommended by the manufacturer to see if they are likely to help.

Monitor the effect on your symptoms. If a product does not appear effective you could consider another brand, as different manufacturers contain different bacteria.

### Golden linseeds:

These seeds can be added to foods such as breakfast cereal, yoghurts or soups. If necessary, take up to one tablespoon a day. Give your bowels a few days to adjust to the effect. Remember to have plenty of fluids immediately after taking linseeds and drink plenty throughout the day.

### Resistant Starch:

These are not completely digested by the body. They enter the bowel where they ferment and produce gas. Resistant starch is in the following foods:-

- Pulses, whole grains, sweetcorn, green bananas and muesli that contains bran.
- Undercooked or reheated potato or maize/corn – instead eat them freshly cooked and still hot.
- oven chips, crisps, potato waffles, fried rice.
- Part-baked and reheated breads, such as garlic bread, pizza bases.
- Processed food such as potato or pasta salad, or manufactured biscuits and cakes.
- Ready meals containing pasta or potato.

- Dried pasta – use fresh pasta instead.

## Useful contact numbers:

### CORE

(formerly Digestive Disorders Foundation)  
Advice and information on digestive disorders

**Tel:** 020 7486 0341

**Website:** [www.corecharity.org.uk](http://www.corecharity.org.uk)

### IBS Network

Unit 5,  
53 Mowbray Street,  
Sheffield, S3 8EN  
(All written enquiries must be accompanied by a SAE)

### Self Help IBS Group

[www.ibsgroup.org](http://www.ibsgroup.org)

### Steps for Stress

[www.stepsforstress.org](http://www.stepsforstress.org)

### The Gut Trust Helpline

**Tel:** 0114 272 3253

**Website:** [www.theguttrust.org](http://www.theguttrust.org)

**BDA Website:** [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

**NICE website:** [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Aintree University Hospitals Dietitians:

**Tel:** 0151 529 3473



### If you require a special edition of this leaflet

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on audio tape or disk and in other languages on request. Please contact:

**Tel No: 0151 529 2906**

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