

Patient information

Dietary advice for patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

What is IBS?

IBS is a common condition that affects approximately 1 in every 5 people. An assessment for IBS should be considered if you have had any of the following symptoms for at least six months:

- Abdominal pain or discomfort,
- Bloating,
- Change in bowel habit (diarrhoea and/or constipation)

A diagnosis of IBS should be considered only if there is abdominal pain or discomfort that is either relieved by defaecation or associated with altered bowel frequency (increased or decreased), or stool form (hard, lumpy, loose, or watery). This should be accompanied by at least two of the following four symptoms:

- Altered stool passage (straining, urgency, incomplete evacuation)
- Abdominal bloating, distension, tension or hardness
- Symptoms made worse by eating
- Passage of mucus in your stools

Severity of symptoms varies from person to person, and some people may experience a lack of energy, nausea, backache, headache, or bladder symptoms also.

It is important that a diagnosis of IBS is confirmed before proceeding with dietary interventions to ensure other causes of symptoms have been excluded.

If you have any of the following symptoms as well as any of the symptoms listed above, you should speak to your GP for referral to a specialist.

- Unintentional and unexplained weight loss
- Rectal bleeding

- A family history of bowel cancer, ovarian cancer, coeliac disease or inflammatory bowel disease
- A change in bowel habits to looser and/or more frequent stools persisting for more than six weeks in a person aged over 60 years

How to manage symptoms of IBS?

Unfortunately there is no cure for IBS, but symptoms can often be managed with simple changes to your diet and lifestyle. It is important to remember that IBS is not caused by a food allergy. If you feel that you may be suffering with a food allergy, please refer to Allergy UK (www.allergyuk.org) or Anaphylaxis Campaign (www.anaphylaxis.org.uk) for further information.

Some people find that stress and anxiety can worsen symptoms of IBS, therefore if you are able to reduce your stress/anxiety levels, this can reduce severity and frequency of symptoms. For support with managing your stress and anxiety please visit <https://www.wellbeingnands.co.uk/suffolk/>.

If your symptoms persist after following the general lifestyle and dietary advice contained below, for the recommended length of time, then you should reintroduce the foods you have cut out of your diet and ask your doctor to refer you to your local Dietitian. Further dietary manipulation may be required, such as a single food avoidance or exclusion diet, for example the low FODMAP diet, and these types of diet should only be undertaken with the advice and support of a Dietitian to ensure appropriateness and dietary adequacy.

General dietary changes to consider

- Aim to eat 3 regular meals daily or smaller more frequent meals if this is tolerated better
- Try not to skip any meals or leave long gaps between eating
- Limit alcohol intake to no more than two units per day with at least two alcohol free days per week
- Limit caffeine-containing drinks to no more than two mugs (three cups) per day, this includes tea, coffee, green tea, energy drinks
- Reduce intake of fizzy drinks
- Ensure adequate fluid intake daily, especially water or other non-caffeinated drinks e.g. herbal teas, diluted cordial/squash, aiming for 2 litres daily

List continued over page

- Reduce intake of rich or fatty foods such as chips, fast-foods, ready meals, pies, batter, cheese, pizza, creamy sauces, fatty meats such as burgers and sausages, crisps, chocolate, cake, biscuits, spreads, and cooking oils
- Reduce intake of spicy foods
- Reduce intake of manufactured foods such as ready meals and cook meals from fresh ingredients wherever possible
- Limit fresh fruit intake to three portions per day. One portion = 80g
- Chew your meals well and ensure you take time to relax and enjoy your meal
- Reduce intake of 'resistant starches' as outlined below

Resistant starches

These are the starches in foods that are not completely digested by the body. They enter the bowel where they ferment and produce gas. Try reducing your intake of the following foods:

- pulses, whole grains, sweetcorn, green bananas, and muesli that contains wheat bran
- undercooked or reheated potato or maize/corn – instead eat them freshly cooked and still hot
- oven chips, crisps, potato waffles, fried rice – choose freshly cooked potatoes or boiled rice
- part-baked and reheated breads, such as garlic bread, pizza base – choose fresh breads
- processed food such as potato or pasta salad, or manufactured biscuits and cakes
- ready meals containing pasta or potato, such as lasagne, shepherd's pie, macaroni cheese
- dried pasta – use fresh pasta instead

Lifestyle changes to consider

- Take time to relax – some people use relaxation tapes, yoga, aromatherapy, massage, or meditation books/apps to help with this
- Regular exercise, for example walking, cycling, and swimming
- Chew your food well and take time to eat your meals slowly and whilst sitting at a table

Things to remember

- Make one change at a time, trying each change for 3-4 weeks (unless specified otherwise) to see if symptoms are improving
- Keep a food and symptom diary to monitor any changes or improvement of symptoms
- Only make changes according to the symptoms you are experiencing

Specific symptom management

For symptoms of bloating and wind, consider making the following changes:

- Limit intake of gas producing foods such as beans and pulses, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, sugar-free mints and chewing gum
- Include oats (porridge or oat-based cereals) regularly in your diet
- Include linseeds (up to 1-2 tablespoons daily) regularly, ensuring they are always consumed with uncaffeinated fluid (150ml fluid per tablespoon). Gradually increase your intake of linseeds, starting with ¼ tablespoon daily. Linseeds can be added to salads, soups, cereals, yogurt etc.

For symptoms of constipation:

- Ensure that you drink at least eight glasses of water and uncaffeinated fluids per day
- Gradually increase your fibre intake, ensuring no sudden increases as this may worsen symptoms. Good sources of fibre include wholegrains, oats, vegetables, fruit and linseeds. High fibre foods help to soften stools and make them easier to pass
- Aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, see portion size information below
- Include linseeds (up to 1-2 tablespoons daily) regularly, ensuring they are always consumed with fluid (150ml fluid per tablespoon). Gradually increase your intake of linseeds, starting with ¼ tablespoon daily. Linseeds can be added to salads, soups, cereals, yogurt etc.
- Avoid adding any extra wheat bran

For symptoms of diarrhoea:

- Ensure intake of at least 2 litres of fluid daily to replace lost fluids
- Limit caffeine intake to no more than 2 mugs (3 cups) daily, this includes tea, coffee and any soft drinks containing caffeine
- Try to reduce intake of high-fibre foods such as wholegrain breakfast cereals and breads, instead choosing white alternatives
- Avoid sugar-free sweets, mints, gum, and drinks that contain sorbitol, mannitol, and xylitol.

What is a portion of fruit and vegetables?

Fresh fruit = 80 g

- 1 apple, banana, pear, orange, or similar sized fruit
- ½ grapefruit, 1 slice of large fruit (melon, pineapple)
- 2 plums, apricots etc
- a handful of grapes, cherries, berries
- 3 heaped tablespoons fruit salad (fresh, tinned, stewed)

Dried fruit = 30 g

- 1 heaped tablespoon raisins, figs, apricots

Vegetables = 80 g

- 3 heaped tablespoons raw, cooked, frozen or tinned vegetables
- a dessert bowl of salad

Low lactose diet

Lactose is a sugar which is found in animal milks (including cow's, goat's and sheep's) and products made from these. It is normally digested by the enzyme 'lactase' to be absorbed into the body. Individuals with lactose intolerance lack sufficient lactase and often present with a range of symptoms such as diarrhoea, abdominal pain, bloating and/or flatulence. If you notice your symptoms to be related to milk and milk products, consider trialling a low lactose diet for a period of 2-4 weeks and monitor your symptoms.

Suitable alternatives to consider:

- Lactose free milk
- Plant based milk e.g. soy, coconut, rice, oat, hazelnut, hemp, almond, quinoa (opt for options fortified with calcium)
- Lactose free yogurt
- Plant based yogurt, custard, ice cream e.g. soy, coconut
- Custard powder made up with lactose-free or plant based milk
- Low lactose cheeses e.g. cheddar (full fat), feta, pecorino, brie, blue, edam, soy, mozzarella, goat's, camembert
- Dark chocolate
- Butter and vegetable spreads

Suitable in small amounts:

- Cow's milk – limit intake to 50ml per sitting
- Milk or white chocolate – limit intake to 30g (~3-4 squares) per sitting
- Sour cream, kefir, crème fraîche, whipped cream – limit intake to 1-2tbsp per sitting
- Cheeses such as cottage cheese, cream cheese, low fat cream cheese, halloumi, ricotta, quark, cheese triangles – limit intake to 2tbsp (40g) per sitting
- Normal ice-cream – limit intake to 1 scoop per sitting
- Normal custard – limit intake to 2tbsp per sitting

Check the ingredients lists of all prepared food and drinks, and avoid any containing the following: Milk, Lactose, Whey, Curds, Milk Powder.

If your symptoms improve, continue to follow low lactose diet but do ensure to gradually reintroduce higher lactose containing foods/drinks back into your diet to test your tolerance levels. Repeat this challenge every few weeks.

If you found that you have lactose intolerance, you can consider purchasing '**lactase**' **enzymes** which can be found online or in pharmacy. These are usually available in a form of a tablet or drops. These can help you to digest lactose. Follow manufacturers guidance on how to take them.

If your symptoms do not improve, it may suggest that lactose intolerance may not be the cause of your symptoms. It is advised that you stop the low lactose diet and gradually reintroduce lactose back into your diet and speak to your dietitian/healthcare professional for other causes for your symptoms.

Please note that **calcium** is an essential nutrient to ensure healthy bones and teeth. It is often found in milk and milk derived products but also in fortified plant-based milks and products. It is recommended that adults aim to have 700mg of calcium a day which equates to around 2-3 portions of calcium rich foods. For more information on calcium, visit British Dietetic Association (BDA) and look for 'Calcium' diet sheet (see link below).

Low fructan diet

Fructans are a type of fermentable carbohydrate which is found in wheat, barley and rye and some fruit and vegetables. These are poorly absorbed in all people. These then cause fermentation in a large bowel which can be a cause of symptoms such as diarrhoea, bloating and flatulence in IBS sensitive individuals. It is important to note that fructans are not the same as gluten although a lot of gluten containing foods will also contain fructans.

If you associate your symptoms with fructan containing foods, consider trialling a low fructan diet for a period of 2-4 weeks and monitor your symptoms.

Suitable alternatives to consider:

- Gluten free pasta, bread, flour, noodles, pastry, biscuits, cakes, cereals, breadcrumbs
- Sourdough spelt bread (made with 100% spelt flour)
- White potato
- Rice e.g. white, basmati, long grain, brown, wild, rice bran
- Oats and oat bran e.g. porridge, oat biscuits, flapjack, Oatibix
- Polenta
- Buckwheat
- Quinoa
- Non-wheat cereals e.g. cornflakes, rice krispies, porridge

If your symptoms improve, continue to follow a low fructan diet but do ensure to gradually reintroduce higher fructan containing foods back into your diet to test your tolerance levels.

If your symptoms do not improve, it may suggest that fructans may not be the cause for your symptoms. It is advised that you reintroduce fructans back into your diet and speak to your dietitian/healthcare professional for other causes for your symptoms.

Probiotics

Some people find that probiotics can help to improve symptoms of IBS, however there is currently little evidence to support this. If you do wish to try 'probiotic' supplements, yoghurts or fermented milk drinks, then you should take the manufacturer's recommended daily dose for a period of at least 4 weeks and up to 12 weeks. If they do not improve your symptoms after that period of time then you could try an alternative brand.

Useful websites [Last accessed February 2024]

The IBS Network

0114 272 3253

www.theibsnetwork.org

IBS diet: video guide

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/ibs-diet-video-guide/>

IBS management: Webinar

www.patientwebinars.co.uk

Guts UK Charity

020 7486 0341

<https://gutscharity.org.uk/>

Mental Health, Wellbeing and Emotional Support

<https://www.wellbeingnands.co.uk/>

BDA Calcium Diet Sheet

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/calcium.html>

Pain Concern

www.painconcern.org.uk

Can help with pain management techniques and advice

Feel Good Suffolk

<https://feelgoodsuffolk.co.uk/>

Can help with weight loss, smoking cessation, increasing activity levels and more

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the disabledgo website link below:

<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>