

IBS: Diet and Irritable Bowel Syndrome Symptom Control

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you change your diet. If you need more detailed advice or if you are following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.

Diet and Symptoms of IBS

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a term used to describe a variety of gut symptoms. It can also be referred to as a functional bowel disorder (FBD).

Typical symptoms of IBS include: abdominal pain, bloating, wind (flatulence and burping), loose stools/diarrhoea and constipation. Dietary changes can often help improve the symptoms of IBS.

Remember to alter your diet gradually to give your bowels time to adjust. You may like to monitor your progress by keeping a food and symptom diary.

According to your individual symptoms, you need to make specific changes to your diet, as suggested below. Make changes according to your most troublesome symptom.

Constipation

- Maintain a good fluid intake. Have about 8 large glasses / mugs (about two litres) each day. Drink at regular times through the day.
- Increase your fibre intake. Have more vegetables and fruit. Use wholegrain products, such as wholemeal bread and wholewheat cereals.

Increase your fibre intake gradually to give your bowels time to adjust.

- Oats and linseeds are good sources of soluble fibre, which help to soften the stool and make it easier to pass.
 - Try porridge or an oat-based cereal for breakfast.

Linseeds

Try golden or brown linseeds (whole or ground). Build up gradually to 1-2 tablespoons of linseeds per day. Ensure you have an extra 150ml (small glass) of fluid with each tablespoon. Linseeds can be added to cereals, yogurts, soup, salad, or taken as a daily supplement. They are available from supermarkets. Ask for an information sheet about 'Linseeds and IBS'.

Note: We do not recommend adding extra wheat bran to food.

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Bloating and Wind

- Limit your fruit intake to 3 portions a day. A portion of fruit is about a handful. Make up to the recommended '5 –a-day' with extra vegetables or salad.
- Have only one small glass (150ml) of fruit juice each day.
- Limit your intake of gas producing food, such as cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, beans and pulses, and sugar-free sweets, mints and gum.
- You may have an intolerance to dairy products (see below).

Intolerance to Dairy Products

Lactose is a sugar found in milk and can cause bloating, wind, and loose stools in some people. Try lactose-free dairy products such as lactose free cow's milk, lactose free yogurts and lactose free soft cheeses. Ask for more information about 'Lactose Intolerance'. Reduce your lactose intake for 2-4 weeks.

If there is no improvement in your symptoms, you can try a Milk Free Diet, which also excludes milk proteins. You can discuss this with your dietitian.

If there is no benefit, you should return to using ordinary dairy products.

Diarrhoea or Loose Stools

- Maintain a good, regular fluid intake. Have about 8 large glasses / mugs (about two litres) each day.
- Reduce your fibre intake. Choose white bread and low fibre breakfast cereals such as cornflakes or rice crispies.
- Have only one small glass (150ml) of fruit juice each day.
- Reduce your intake of caffeine from coffee, tea and soft drinks with added caffeine (such as cola, some energy drinks) to a maximum 3 drinks per day.
- Some sugar-free foods contain sugar alcohols (sorbitol, xylitol, mannitol), which can have a laxative effect. Avoid sugar free sweets, mints and chewing gum.
- A lactose-free or milk-free diet may help some people – see the advice above.

Probiotics

Probiotics are available as yogurts, drinks or supplements. If you already are taking these and are helping your symptoms, continue with it. Otherwise, try it after the low FODMAP diet and continue according to the manufactures instructions for 4 weeks to see if it has an effect on your symptoms. You will need to take them daily for at least 4 weeks at the dose recommended by the manufacturer.

Prebiotics

Prebiotics promote the activity of beneficial bacteria in the gut. However, although they are usually helpful, you may find your symptoms get worse when taking products containing prebiotics. Avoid prebiotics in food and supplements. They may also be listed as ingredients such as, inulin, oligofructose, FOS.