

Management and Lifestyle Advice for Adults with Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Information for Patients

This patient information is written to provide patients with information and advice on how to manage your symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome by making changes to your diet, lifestyle habits and daily routine. By taking more exercise, eating the right foods and trying to stick to a daily routine this can be a useful first step in tackling the symptoms of IBS as well as improving your general well being

Introduction

Irritable Bowel Syndrome is a very common condition affecting up to 1 in 5 people at any one time. It describes a variety of symptoms which vary from one person to another and can be worse for some people than others.

The most common symptoms are

- Wind and/or bloating
- Diarrhoea or constipation (or both)
- Low abdominal pain, which may ease after opening the bowels or be accompanied by a change in bowel habit or stool appearance
- Passing mucus
- Feeling that your symptoms are worse after eating

Making time to exercise and relax

As part of an overall healthy lifestyle, we recommend that you try to make the most of any available leisure time that you can. We advise that you:

- Make time to relax everyday
- Take part in regular physical activity or exercise, ideally aiming for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity (for example, brisk walking) per day, 5 days per week. This can be spread out over the course of the day (e.g. 10 minutes, 3 times in a day).

Eating Well to help your Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Making changes to your diet as part of your daily routine could help to improve your IBS. Disturbances to routine, eating in a hurry or on the move and missing meals can all lead to worsening the symptoms of IBS since eating stimulates the action of the bowel.

The following advice can help:

- You should make time to eat regular meals and allow time afterwards to digest your food.
- Your bowels like routine; the same things to eat, at the same time, day in and day out
- Avoid missing meals or having long gaps between meals
- Drink at least 8 cups of fluid per day especially water or drinks without caffeine
- Limit tea or coffee to 3 cups per day
- Reduce your intake of alcohol and fizzy drinks (especially “diet” drinks)
- If you experience abdominal pain or bloating, it may help you to limit intake of fibre and reduce starchy carbohydrates which can create gas in your bowel
- Limit fresh fruit to 3 portions per day (1 portion=80g)
- If you suffer from diarrhoea you should avoid the artificial sweetener Sorbitol
- If you experience wind and bloating you should try eating oats (porridge or muesli) and/or linseeds (try taking up to 1 tablespoon per day sprinkled on cereal or yoghurt or in soups or salads)

Probiotics

- Probiotic yoghurts or drinks may help with constipation or bloating but you should try it for at least 4 weeks
- Try a daily probiotic drink or yoghurt which contains at least 1 million (1×10^6) “good” bacteria. Probiotics can give some people diarrhoea.

This is some general advice about some of the common foods which can worsen symptoms of IBS. If you choose to cut something out, try one of these food types at a time Try to cut that out for no more than 2 weeks and start taking it again if you feel no different

Fibre

- Think about how much fibre you eat
- Eating more fibre can help with constipation
- But, it can sometimes make abdominal pains and bloating worse

- Eating more oats or linseeds (soluble fibre) can be much more effective and help with pain, wind and bloating
- Linseeds can be found in the supermarket
- Try taking up to a tablespoon each day in cereals or yoghurt or salads
- You should make any changes to the amount of fibre gradually, over 1-2 weeks

Wheat

- Cutting down on the amount of wheat (bread, biscuits, cakes, beer) you eat can help a lot with wind, bloating and abdominal pains
- You need to ask your GP for a Coeliac blood test first

Starchy Carbohydrates

- These are starchy carbohydrates which are generally very good for us but in some people eating these foods causes wind, bloating and abdominal pains
- Partially cooking and then reheating carbohydrates such as pasta, pizza, garlic bread and oven chips or other potato products makes them difficult to digest, causing wind, bloating and pain.
- Try avoiding or cutting down how often you have these foods

Lactose

- A small number of people cannot digest lactose found in dairy foods (lactose intolerant)
- This is rare in people from Northern Europe but much more common in people from other parts of the world
- Try cutting down on dairy products for 1-2 weeks if you have problems with wind, bloating and cramps or pain
- Most lactose intolerant people can take small amounts of lactose (up to 200ml or a small glass of milk a day) if taken in small amounts
- Some foods like cottage cheese, hard cheeses and yoghurt have very low levels of lactose. Still eating these helps you keep up your intake of calcium for healthy bones

Caffeine

- Found in tea, coffee, colas and energy drinks
- Caffeine stimulates the body
- It can cause heartburn or reflux
- It can worsen diarrhoea
- Limit drinks containing caffeine to no more than 3 per day

Sorbitol

- Found naturally in dried fruits (especially apple, apricot, prunes, cherries and pears)
- Also used extensively as a low calorie or sugar free sweetener
- This can have laxative effects
- Avoid if you suffer from diarrhoea

Additional Information

For further information regarding Irritable Bowel Syndrome, please go to:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs>

<https://www.theibsnetwork.org/>

Interpretation and Translation

This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language.

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