

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Irritable Bowel Syndrome is a common condition in which individuals may experience irregular bowel movements, diarrhoea, constipation and abdominal bloating or pain. The pattern and severity of symptoms can vary from person to person.

IT IS NOT NORMAL TO EXPERIENCE CONTINUOUS DIARRHOEA, BLOOD IN THE STOOLS OR WEIGHT LOSS WITH IBS. ANYONE WITH THESE SYMPTOMS SHOULD CONSULT A DOCTOR.

Food allergy & IBS

Many patients feel that diet affects their IBS and suspect that they may be allergic to one or more foods. It is certainly true that some foods can upset IBS, but there is little evidence that this is due to a true allergy. It is possible that symptoms may be due to an intolerance to foods.

Unfortunately, inaccurate and contradictory advice is often given by non-medical 'allergists' or alternative practitioners and a wide range of unproven tests are used. The only reliable way to find out if symptoms are made worse by foods is by an exclusion or elimination diet. This is best done under the supervision of a dietician.

Tips for Managing IBS

Most people find that their bowels work better if they:

- Eat regular meals
- Drinks plenty of fluid
- Chew food well and take time over meals
- Follow a balanced diet
- Take time to relax
- Take regular exercise

If the main symptom is constipation:

- Eat regular meals - skipping breakfast is not recommended as the bowels lose an important reflex triggered by the first meal of the day.
- Drink 8-10 glasses of fluid each day to help the stools stay soft.
- Increase fibre in the diet gradually to find a level that helps. It is best to do this by eating more fruit and vegetables aiming for a

minimum of 5 portions a day. Porridge oats are a good source of fibre which may also help. Bran is best avoided as this can worsen symptoms of bloating.

If the main symptom is diarrhoea:

- Eat regular meals and try not to eat large meals late at night.
- Reduce caffeine intake from tea, coffee and cola – drink more water, sugar free squash or herbal teas instead.
- Reduce alcohol intake.
- Reduce intake of fruit juices.
- Avoid sorbitol in sugar free sweets, mints and gum.

If the main symptom is wind and bloating:

IBS sufferers do not produce more gas than other people but they are more aware of it and it can feel as if it gets trapped.

- Reduce intake of pulses (beans and lentils), cabbage, Brussel sprouts, onions
- Avoid fizzy drinks
- Reduce intake of ready made meals, tinned or packet soups, ready made sauces. Try to use fresh ingredients as much as possible. Reduce intake of dried pasta and use fresh pasta instead.

If the above suggestions have not helped, try keeping a food and symptom diary. A diary may help to identify whether certain food groups are causing symptoms e.g. dairy products or wheat. When excluding a food group, plan ahead and think about what it can be replaced with e.g. replacing milk products with calcium fortified soya products. If the exclusion has helped and is going to be long-term, request a referral to a Dietician to advise on how to ensure the remaining diet is well balanced.

Further information:

If your symptoms are severe or are not helped by these measures you should be seen by a gastroenterologist for further investigation.

Useful contacts:

IBS Network , Unit 5, 53 Mowbray Street,
Sheffield. S3 8EN
Tel: 0114 272 3253
[www. Ibsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.ibsnetwork.org.uk)

IBS Research Appeal
www.ibsresearchupdate.org

Core (charity name for Digestive Disorders
Foundation)
3 St Andrews Place
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