

IBS: Diet and Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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.

Introduction

The symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) vary from one person to another. Your symptoms need to be considered carefully so that individual dietary advice can be offered. However, there are some general guidelines, looking at lifestyle and food habits, which can help most people. It may be useful to make these changes before trying other dietary restrictions.

Always make any dietary changes slowly to give your bowels time to adjust.

Healthy Lifestyle and Eating Habits

Simple changes to your lifestyle and eating habits can help some of the symptoms of IBS. Try the following suggestions:

Good Habits

- Eat at regular intervals through-out the day.
- Have small meals, with additional snacks if needed.
- Eat slowly, in a calm atmosphere, and chew food well.
- Have a good posture when eating (sit upright and do not slouch). Sit down to eat at a table if you can.
- Take regular exercise, such as walking or swimming.

Poor Habits

These habits may make your symptoms worse. Try to avoid:

- An irregular meal pattern, missing meals and/or binge eating.
- Eating late at night.
- Strenuous activity immediately after a meal.
- Wearing tight clothes.
- Eating highly spiced food.
- Smoking may aggravate the symptoms of IBS. Try to cut down or stop smoking if you can. Ask your doctor for help.

Lifestyle Issues

Stress, anxiety and the demands of everyday life can play an important part in bowel problems. Try to find ways to reduce stress and take time to relax. Yoga, meditation, massage or aromatherapy may help. Try Mindfulness or Head Space apps on your smart phone or android tablets.

Steps For Stress www.stepsforstress.org Wellbeing Service www.wellbeingnands.co.uk

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Aim for a Healthy Diet

Eating a nutritious, well- balanced diet, which contains a good variety of foods may help regulate your bowel habits and improve your symptoms.

Avoid having too many fried foods and those that are high in fat, such as chips, crisps, chocolate, cake and biscuits, pies, fatty meats, sausages, burgers, fast foods, pies, pizza, cheese, cream.

Reduce your intake of manufactured foods and re-heated or ready meals. Cook using fresh ingredients when you can.

Alcohol

If you suffer with loose stools or diarrhoea, limit your alcohol intake as it may make this problem worse. Avoid having alcohol on an empty stomach. Limit your alcohol intake to no more than 2 units per day. Have at least two alcohol free days per week. Most alcoholic drinks are low in FODMAP. e.g.: beer, gin, vodka, whiskey and wine (red, sparkling or white)

Check your Fluid Intake

- It is important to drink enough fluid every day as this helps to regulate your bowels.
- Aim to include at least 8 large cups or glasses of fluid (about 2 litres) each day.
- Suitable fluids are water, squash or cordial (try sugar free varieties if you want to avoid increasing your sugar intake), fruit juice (150ml per day and dilute with water), decaffeinated tea and coffee, herbal and fruit teas, milk
- Limit fizzy drinks, as the gas may aggravate bloating.

Some people with IBS may need to avoid certain sweeteners in sugar-free and diet drinks. Other people may not be able to tolerate milk and fruit juices. You may need more detailed advice from a dietitian. Ask your doctor for a referral.

Caffeine

Caffeine can stimulate the bowel to work. Avoid large amounts of coffee, strong tea, cola or energy/stimulant drinks. Try decaffeinated options.

Further Advice

If your symptoms do not improve after 4 weeks, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian for specialist advice. They may suggest you follow a low FODMAP diet, which reduces fermentable carbohydrates in the diet.

Information about Lifestyle Changes, Healthy Eating and IBS

Change4Life www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/

The British Dietetic Association – Food Facts www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

The IBS Network www.theibsnetwork.org