

## Irritable Bowel Syndrome: Diet and Stress

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common diagnosis for a wide array of digestive disorders that affects as many as 15% of the general population. IBS symptoms may include gas and bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and constipation.

### What is Causing These Symptoms?

Symptoms of IBS may be related other problems. It is important to first rule out other causes of gas, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea and constipation. A simple cause of IBS is lactose. More significant causes could include small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, celiac disease, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), diverticulitis, gall bladder disease or gastrointestinal cancers. You should be screened for all of these conditions before proceeding to identify other nutritional strategies to cope with IBS.

### The Basics

**Eat, drink and sleep consistently**, at the same time each day, eat consistent amounts and types of food, especially vegetables and fruits, and fats and oils. Eat every 3-5 hours.

**Peppermint** can be used to calm intestinal spasms.

### **Avoid excessive fiber and fat.**

Avoid foods with added fiber, like high fiber cereals, bars and breads. Also avoid fried foods and creamy sauces, and limit salad dressing, nuts and seeds.

### **Eat calmly and slowly.**

Stress has a negative impact on IBS and how efficiently you digest your food. Take 5 deep breaths and minimize distractions before starting to eat.

### **Take a fiber supplement.**

This should be a non-fermentable fiber source to reduce bloating associated with fiber supplements. Choose a purified methylcellulose, hemicellulose, psyllium or ground flax seed supplement rather than fermentable pectin or beta-glucan, to help with both diarrhea and constipation.



### **Drink plenty of water each day.**

Staying hydrated helps your gastrointestinal system function optimally. Estimate your daily fluid requirement, in ounces, by dividing your body weight, in pounds, by two.

### **Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.**

Caffeine, nicotine and alcohol are gastrointestinal irritants and stimulants that can make IBS symptoms worse.

### **Evaluate your dietary supplements.**

Side effects of vitamin and mineral supplements may contribute to your GI discomfort. For example, Vitamin C and magnesium can cause diarrhea; calcium carbonate can cause bloating and constipation.

### **Practice relaxation techniques every day.**

Living with the symptoms of IBS is stressful. A regular relaxation practice may help with that stress as well as the hypersensitivity in the digestive tract itself.

### **Be patient and persistent.**

Changing the intestinal environment to correct the underlying causes of IBS may take several weeks to a few months. Be consistent and persist in your practices until your symptoms are improved. Work with your Nutrition Counselor, be patient, and realize that trial and error is often involved in the process of controlling IBS.



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## New Ideas

New approaches to IBS focuses on food sensitivities, abnormal gut bacteria, inflammation and the relationship between the nervous system and the digestive system.

### **Consider food intolerances.**

Lactose, fructose and gluten intolerance can all manifest as IBS. Your nutrition counselor will assess your diet and symptoms to evaluate if you are experiencing food intolerance.

Your Nutrition Counselor may also discuss FODMAPs with you. FODMAPs stands for Fermentable Oligo-, Di- and Mono-saccharides, and Polyols. These are specific types of carbohydrates in food. Your symptoms of IBS may be related to relative intolerances to some or all of these carbohydrates.

### **Be aware of food sensitivities.**

Sensitivities for certain foods may be related to IBS symptoms for many people, but it is often difficult to determine the offending foods. Blood tests for food sensitivities are available; they are non-conventional and controversial. Blood tests for food sensitivities measure IgG antibodies rather than the traditional IgE antibodies. If a food sensitivity test is not available, following a diet that eliminates common food allergens may help.



The foods most likely to be involved in IBS are milk, yeast, egg, wheat, peas, nuts, soy, barley, corn, and beef, chicken and fish, although any food may be troublesome. Before eliminating any foods from your diet, talk to your Nutrition Counselor if exploring food sensitivities is right for you.

### **Limit or eliminate other bothersome foods.**

The following foods have been associated with IBS symptoms and may or may not affect you.

- Carrageenan and other gums such as guar, acacia, xanthan, and locust bean found in non-dairy milks, snack bars, yogurts and ice cream, cause gas and bloating.
- Sugar alcohols, like sorbitol, mannitol, maltitol, xylitol and other compounds ending in “-ol” are found in sugar-free foods like gums, mints, candies, jams and “low-” or “zero net carb” products, and cause gas and bloating.
- Caffeine stimulates your intestinal system and worsens diarrhea.
- Large portions of starchy foods and sugary foods contribute to abnormal gut bacteria.
- Consider a diet low in FODMAPs that limits foods that contain fructose (fruit and syrups), lactose (milk and yogurt), fructo- and galactooligosaccharides (wheat and legumes), and sugar alcohols (sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, and maltitol). These compounds are poorly absorbed, highly osmotic and rapidly fermented by bacteria, leading to symptoms of IBS.
- Legumes like beans and lentils, and certain vegetables, such as onions, garlic, leeks, scallions, and asparagus, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, radishes, kale, and collard greens may increase gas and bloating.

### **Do not become overwhelmed by eliminating foods in your diet.**

Frequently people with IBS will start eliminating foods that are suspected to cause irritating IBS symptoms. Be sure to thoroughly evaluate if the elimination was effective. Remove the suspected food for a period of time, determined by you and your Nutrition Counselor, monitor your symptoms and then try adding the food back. You don’t want to unnecessarily restrict foods in your diet.

### **Stimulate the healthy bacteria in your digestive tract.**

When there is an imbalance between the “good” and “bad” bacteria in your digestive tract it becomes harder to digest food, more inflammation occurs in your gut and you will have more IBS symptoms. Talk to your Nutrition Counselor about an appropriate probiotic supplement.

### **Reduce inflammation and anxiety with an omega 3 supplement.**

Talk to your Nutrition Counselor about an appropriate omega 3 supplement.