



Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS): The low FODMAP diet

This leaflet explains what the low FODMAP diet is for patients with irritable bowel syndrome.

Your name:	_____
Your dietitian:	_____
Dietitian contact number:	_____

What is IBS?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common condition of the digestive system that affects one in five people.

The cause of IBS is not yet fully understood, and treatment can vary from person to person.

Erratic eating or having a poor diet may be a contributing factor. Some people find they develop it after food poisoning or gastroenteritis.

Typical IBS symptoms include diarrhoea, constipation, bloating, abdominal pain and wind. Stress and anxiety can make symptoms worse.

These symptoms can also occur due to other conditions, so it is important that your GP excludes inflammatory bowel disease, coeliac disease and bowel cancer.

The symptoms of IBS can be reduced with medication, making changes to your lifestyle and managing your diet. Medications do not work for everyone, so you may decide to look into other possible treatments.

Can I manage IBS through my diet?

Yes, you can. If you have been diagnosed with IBS by a doctor, they may have given you some first line dietary advice on how to manage your IBS, which may have included:

- Eating three meals a day
- Limiting your alcohol intake to no more than two units per day
- Keeping a food-symptom diary to see what has helped
- Taking time to relax
- Cutting down on rich or fatty foods
- Taking time to eat your meals and chewing your food well
- Exercising regularly
- Reducing your intake of manufactured foods and using fresh ingredients when cooking

For many people, following this advice helps reduce symptoms. If you don't see any improvement, you may benefit from being referred to our Dietetics Team.

During your appointment, the dietitian will review and discuss the overall balance of your diet and give you tailored advice that is specific to your symptoms.

What is the low FODMAP diet?

It is an evidence-based approach to managing your diet. FODMAP stands for **F**ermentable (wind-producing) **O**ligosaccharides, **D**isaccharides, **M**onosaccharides and **P**olyols. These are a group of carbohydrates that naturally occur in a variety of foods. Eating FODMAPs can lead to changes within the digestive system that can cause symptoms such as diarrhoea, constipation, wind, bloating and pain.

The low FODMAP diet has been shown to reduce symptoms in more than 70 per cent of people with IBS. If you have already followed first line dietary advice but still don't see any improvements, we may suggest you try the low FODMAP diet.

When you eat FODMAPs, they stay in your digestive system until you go to the toilet. This is because your small intestine cannot easily absorb them, so they move into your large intestine. While they are in your large intestine, bacteria will feed on them causing wind and bloating. Fluid may also move into your large intestine, and this can cause diarrhoea.

Reducing the amount of these carbohydrates in your digestive system can reduce the symptoms of IBS for most people.

How the low FODMAP diet works

The low FODMAP diet is a temporary exclusion diet, i.e. you stop eating foods containing FODMAPs. For that reason, there is a risk that you may not get all the nutrients you need, so you must be under the care of a dietitian while following this diet.

Which foods you need to stop eating will depend on your symptoms. This would be assessed and advised on by the dietitian.

You would need to follow the low FODMAP diet strictly for up to eight weeks. If your symptoms were to improve during this time, the dietitian would advise you how to reintroduce foods one at a time and to then gradually increase the quantity eaten. This helps to identify the amount of different FODMAP foods your body can tolerate.

We would give you detailed written information to take home, and you would be able to contact us with any questions while you were excluding FODMAP foods from your diet.

Most people find they do not have to limit the foods they eat too much in the long term.

Can I find out more information on the internet?

There is a lot of information about the low FODMAP diet on the internet, but we recommend you do not start following the diet until you have had an appointment with a trained FODMAP dietitian who will be able to support and advise you. Some of the FODMAP information on the internet is inaccurate and because you must restrict what you eat, it is important that your diet stays well-balanced. See your GP practice for a referral to the dietitian if you would like to proceed.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk or www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Dietitians ©, November 2023. Next review due: November 2025