



# Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

**This leaflet gives dietary and lifestyle advice on managing your IBS.  
Please contact your dietitian for more detailed advice.**

**Your name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Your dietitian:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Dietitian contact number:** \_\_\_\_\_

## What is IBS?

IBS affects one in five adults. There is no test to diagnose IBS and the exact cause of IBS is unknown. Before making a diagnosis of IBS it is important to exclude other conditions such as Coeliac Disease or inflammatory bowel disease as they can cause similar symptoms. This can be done through a blood test at your GP surgery.

If you require a blood test for Coeliac Disease, you should include gluten (found in regular bread, pasta and cereals) in at least one meal per day for a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the blood test. If you avoid gluten during this time your blood test results may not be accurate.

## What are the symptoms of IBS?

Patients with IBS have more sensitive digestive systems. Symptoms vary from one person to another and may include:

- Diarrhoea and/or constipation.
- Abdominal pain, which may ease after opening the bowels.
- Wind and/or bloating.
- A feeling of urgency to open your bowels.
- Passing mucus.
- Nausea.
- A feeling of fullness, or the need to open the bowels even after just having been to the toilet.

## Managing your IBS

Your doctor may suggest trialling medication to help manage your IBS symptoms. These can help manage IBS symptoms, but it is important to make changes to your diet and lifestyle for the long-term.

## Healthy eating for IBS

There is no specific diet to follow to completely relieve symptoms for all IBS sufferers. However, there are several dietary changes that may help to reduce your symptoms. You can start by

Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent

making sure your diet is well balanced with the different food groups as explained below. A well-balanced diet can minimise your risk of nutrient deficiency as well as poor gut health due to bacterial imbalance.

### **Follow a healthy well-balanced diet:**

- Include 5 portions of fruits and vegetables every day (see advice in the IBS Wind and Bloating leaflet regarding fruit, if you suffer with wind and bloating).
- Eat a variety of starchy carbohydrates, e.g. pasta, potatoes or rice, and include these at each mealtime.
- Aim for 2 daily portions of protein, e.g. meat, fish, Quorn.
- Aim for 2 to 3 daily portions of dairy foods.
- Limit your intake of high fat and high sugar foods. High fat foods include pastries, fast food, fried food, creamy food and drinks, crisps and cakes.
- Limit your intake of processed or reheated foods like ready meals, oven chips, pizzas and part-baked breads.

### **Top tips:**

- Eat your meals at a regular time each day.
- Avoid overeating and eating late at night.
- Take time to sit down to eat meals, eat slowly and chew each mouthful well.
- Aim for at least 1.5-2 litres (8 glasses) of fluid every day, or more if you have diarrhoea or are increasing your fibre intake. Good choices include water, sugar-free and caffeine-free drinks.
- Restriction of caffeinated drinks to 3 cups per day e.g., tea, energy drinks, coffee and cola. Try choosing decaffeinated versions or alternatives such as herbal teas.
- Reduce intake of fizzy drinks.
- Keep to recommended limits for alcohol with at least 2 free alcohol-free days per week. Men and women should have no more than 14 units per week, (2-3 units per day). Drink slowly and alternate with water or non-alcoholic drinks.

### **A healthy lifestyle for IBS**

Lifestyle factors such as stress, anxiety and a lack of physical activity may also worsen or increase your symptoms of IBS. Top tips to help include:

- Take time to relax and try relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga, relaxation tapes, aromatherapy or massage.
- Slow down and leave plenty of time to eat your meals.
- Take regular exercise e.g. walking, cycling or swimming. Ideally build activity into your daily routine, e.g., walk to the shops or join a local walking group.
- If you feel that high stress or anxiety levels are of a particular concern, speak to your GP or Talking Health for further support with managing this. Treatments to improve your mental wellbeing may include cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), breathing techniques, and hypnotherapy.

## Food intolerance

True *allergy* to food is relatively uncommon and unlikely to cause IBS. Food *intolerance* on the other hand can cause IBS type symptoms. There is currently no scientifically validated test that can detect food intolerance, and the only method is through careful exclusion and reintroduction of foods, which should be done under the supervision of a dietitian.

## Lactose intolerance

It is important to exclude lactose intolerance as a cause of your symptoms. Lactose is a natural sugar in milk and some dairy products. Your doctor may suggest a lactose breath test to diagnose this; however, this test is often inconclusive. If you suspect dairy products such as milk or yoghurt worsen your symptoms, it may be worth trialling a low lactose diet.

This involves exclusion of cows' milk-based yoghurt and milk. You can choose lactose-free versions, or dairy-free alternatives such as soya, rice, oat or nut milk-based products instead. Cream, butter and hard cheese are low in lactose and do not usually need to be avoided.

## Useful contacts

British Dietetic Association 'Food Fact Sheets' [www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home)

The IBS Network Tel: 0114 272 32 53

Email: [info@theibsnetwork.org](mailto:info@theibsnetwork.org) Web: [www.theibsnetwork.org](http://www.theibsnetwork.org)

Guts UK - [gutscharity.org.uk](http://gutscharity.org.uk)

Talking Health 'CBT for IBS' - Berkshire Healthcare Tel: 0300 365 2000

Email: [talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk) Web: [www.talkinghealth.berkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.talkinghealth.berkshire.nhs.uk)

MIND [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

Drinkaware [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk) or [www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk](http://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk)

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

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