



Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS): Constipation

This leaflet gives advice on how to reduce constipation for patients with irritable bowel syndrome.

Your name: _____

Your dietitian: _____

Dietitian contact number: _____

What is constipation?

If you are constipated, you may be experiencing the following:

- Not passing stools (faeces) as often as you normally do.
- Passing unusually hard stools.
- Having to strain more than usual.
- Being unable to completely empty your bowels.
- Constipation can be worsened if you delay passing stools. It is important to visit the toilet regularly to encourage regular bowel motions.
- Laxatives are a short-term solution. Try to make long term changes to your diet and lifestyle by altering fluid, dietary fibre, probiotics and physical activity levels.

Fluid

- Drink at least 8 to 10 cups (1.5 to 2 litres or 3 to 4 pints) of fluid per day, such as water, herbal teas or squash.
- Limit caffeinated drinks (e.g. tea, energy drinks, coffee and cola); drink no more than 3 cups per day.
- Restrict intake of fizzy drinks as these can aggravate IBS symptoms.
- Keep to the recommended limits for alcohol with at least 2 alcohol free days per week. Men and women should have no more than 14 units per week (2 to 3 units per day).

Dietary fibre

- Dietary fibre is the indigestible part of food and can help to increase stool bulk and prevent constipation. It is found in the following:
 - Oats, nuts, seeds, beans, peas, pulses, lentils, fruit and vegetables (soluble fibre)
 - Wholegrain and whole wheat breads, cereals and pasta, brown rice (insoluble fibre)
- Adults should aim for 30g of fibre per day or enough until your symptoms improve. High fibre options contain at least 6g of fibre per 100g on the food label.
- Be aware that increasing or modifying your intake of fibre can take time (up to six weeks) to alter your bowel function, so persistence is key. Slowly increase your intake of fibre over a



period of weeks to reduce the risk of bloating and wind. Make changes one at a time. For example, you could increase fruit and vegetable intake to 5 or more portions per day (see advice in the IBS Wind and Bloating leaflet regarding fruit if you suffer from wind and bloating), change to wholegrain breads or use brown rice and pasta.

- Natural laxatives can be found in fruits such as kiwi, rhubarb, papaya and dried fruits, so including these in your diet regularly may help to relieve constipation.
- Don't forget to drink extra fluid if you are increasing your fibre intake. Fibre soaks up water in the gut and makes stools softer and easier to pass. If you increase your fibre intake but do not drink enough fluid, stools can become harder and more difficult to pass.
- If you suffer from wind and bloating, oat bran and linseeds (also known as flaxseed) may be better tolerated. If you choose to try linseeds:
Start with 1 teaspoon and gradually build up to a maximum of 2 level tablespoons of linseeds per day. It does not matter whether seeds are golden or brown, whole or ground.
Drink an extra 150mls fluid with every tablespoon of linseeds.
Add linseeds to foods such as breakfast cereals, yoghurts and soups.
Give your bowels up to 3 to 6 months to get the full benefit of this change.

Probiotics

- Probiotics are good bacteria found in certain food products and may also be bought as supplements. Probiotics can help improve the balance of bacteria in the gut and there is emerging evidence that they can also improve symptoms of constipation.
- There are a range of different probiotic products available, each containing different types and quantities of bacteria. If you choose to try a probiotic, you may wish to start by taking a yoghurt or fermented milk drink such as Activia or Yakult.
- You should use the product as directed by the manufacturer for a minimum of 4 weeks, monitoring the effect on your symptoms. If a product does not appear to have any effect, then consider trying a different brand and speak with your dietitian for further advice.

Physical activity

Regular physical activity can help in the prevention and treatment of constipation, as well as reduce stress, which is often a trigger for bowel changes. Aim to do a minimum of 30 minutes every day. Try walking, swimming, dancing, other sporting activities, or regular chores such as vacuuming and gardening.

Lifestyle

- Identifying a routine place and time of day when you are comfortably able to spend time in the toilet, can encourage the bowel into a regular working pattern.
- A warm drink with breakfast can also help.
- Try to respond to your bowel's natural pattern, meaning when you feel the urge, don't delay.
- When you go to the toilet, propping your feet on a low stool so that your knees are above your hips, can make passing stools easier.

Useful Contacts

British Dietetic Association 'Food Fact Sheets' www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home

The IBS Network Tel: 0114 272 32 53

Email: info@theibsnetwork.org Web: www.theibsnetwork.org

Guts UK – www.gutscharity.org.uk

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

Email: talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk Web: www.talkinghealth.berkshire.nhs.uk

MIND www.mind.org.uk

Drinkaware www.drinkaware.co.uk

Useful apps

- **Headspace:** guided meditation and mindfulness <https://www.headspace.com/>
- **Calm:** guided meditation and mindfulness <https://www.calm.com/>
- **Nerva:** gut-directed hypnotherapy to help improve IBS symptoms <https://try.nervaibs.com>

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