

Managing Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

What is irritable bowel syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome is used to describe a group of gut symptoms. Your symptoms may be related to eating certain foods, lifestyle habits and your mood and stress levels.

Common symptoms include

- Fluctuating abdominal pain and discomfort
- Gas and bloating
- Altered bowel habits

It is important to remember that symptoms may vary from one person to another and can also change over time.

There are several different types of IBS

- Those commonly experiencing diarrhoea (IBS-D)
- Those commonly experiencing constipation (IBS-C)
- Those whose symptoms include both diarrhoea and constipation (IBS-M)

Diagnosing IBS

For a diagnosis of IBS to be confirmed, your doctor will do tests to exclude other conditions such as coeliac disease or inflammatory bowel disease.

How can I manage my symptoms?

General dietary tips

- Eat regular meals and snacks.
- Include at least eight cups of water or non-caffeinated fluids per day (including herbal teas).
- Make home-cooked food with fresh ingredients where possible.
- Limit alcohol intake to no more than two standard drinks per day, with two alcohol-free days per week.

- Limit caffeine intake to less than three cups per day (including tea, coffee and cola).
- Limit intake of soft drinks.
- Limit intake of rich or fatty foods (including chips, fast food, and fatty meats such as burgers and sausages).
- Limit intake of spicy food.

Lifestyle tips

- Take your time when eating meals - sit down, eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Enjoy sharing meals with friends and family.
- Exercise regularly (for example, walking, swimming, or cycling). Check with your doctor if you have not been exercising regularly for some time.
- Your mood and stress levels can affect your gut and bowel habits. Take some time during your day to do an activity that helps you relax or de-stress. For example, meditating, going for a walk outside or reading a book.
- Keep a diary where you write down the foods you ate and the symptoms you experienced (a food and symptom diary) to see which foods are helping or worsening your symptoms. See page 4 for a template and example.

Management of specific symptoms:

Management of wind and bloating

- Reduce gas-producing foods such as:
 - Beans and pulses (eg lentils, chickpeas).
 - Brussels sprouts and cauliflower.
 - Sugar-free mints/chewing gum.
- Try adding flaxseeds/linseeds (up to one tablespoon/day) to foods such as yoghurt, cereals, porridge, casseroles, soups and salads. These can be found in the health food section of most supermarkets and are beneficial due to the type of fibre they contain.
- Avoid eating quickly, eating with your mouth open or chewing gum. This will minimise the amount of air you swallow.

Management of diarrhoea

- Limit caffeine from drinks such as tea, coffee and soft drinks.
- Reduce sugar-free or diet products that contain sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol (such as diet soft drinks, mints and gum).
- Replace lost fluids by drinking enough throughout the day.
- Limit rich and fatty foods as these can sometimes worsen symptoms.

Management of constipation

- Drink adequate fluid, as this can help improve stool frequency and make it easier for stools to pass. Aim for approximately 2 litres per day.
- Include a wide variety of high fibre foods in your diet. You should add these foods gradually as you may get more symptoms if you increase these foods too quickly.

High fibre foods include:

- Oats and oat bran
 - Brown rice
 - Wholemeal or wholegrain bread
 - Wholegrain pasta or couscous
 - Potatoes with skin
 - Quinoa
 - Linseed
 - Fruits and vegetables
- Exercising regularly can also help in managing constipation.

Role of probiotics

- Probiotic supplements, yoghurts, or fermented milk drinks may have a role in reducing IBS symptoms. If you choose to try them, probiotics should be taken daily for at least four weeks. If they do not appear to be effective you may consider another brand or ceasing the supplement altogether.

What should I do now?

1. Trial the diet and lifestyle tips mentioned above.
2. Keep a food and symptom diary to highlight any particular foods that are causing your symptoms to worsen.
3. If you are still experiencing symptoms after trying the strategies mentioned above, it may be recommended that you trial a low FODMAP diet. It is important to go through this process with a dietitian, to ensure it is done safely and effectively.
4. Stress and mood can also negatively impact gut symptoms. Talk to your doctor if you are experiencing problems with stress or mood. They may be able to provide a Mental Health Care Plan so that you can access services to assist you.

Food and symptom diary

Intake (Time/food/amount)	Symptoms (Bloating, distention, gas, pain and location, bowel movements)
BREAKFAST E.g. 8am - ½ cup oats + 1 cup milk (full cream) + 1 banana. 1 cup coffee made on full cream milk.	E.g. 8.45am – bloating and pain in stomach, diarrhoea.
MORNING TEA 	
LUNCH 	
AFTERNOON TEA 	
DINNER 	
SUPPER 	

For further information contact your dietitian or nutritionist: _____