

Eating Guidelines for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Information about Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) affects your gastrointestinal tract (GI tract). The symptoms of IBS may include abdominal pain, bloating, constipation and diarrhea. These symptoms may come and go over time and can affect your quality of life.

Specific foods do not cause IBS, but some foods may make your symptoms worse. The foods that make symptoms worse are different for each person. Keep a food and symptom diary, and if a specific food causes you discomfort, try to avoid it. If your symptoms do not improve, add the food back into your diet. Avoiding many foods can make it hard to get the nutrition you need. If you are avoiding a lot of foods, talk with a registered dietitian.



Steps you can take

To help you manage the symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS):

- Eat a healthy diet by following "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide" www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide.
- Eat regular meals. Be sure to eat breakfast every day. Do not skip meals.
- Eat slowly in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially if you have constipation or diarrhea.
- Chew your food well. Avoid chewing gum. Do not drink carbonated beverages such as soft drinks. These actions will help limit the amount of air that you swallow to help reduce gas and bloating.
- The foods or dietary substances that most commonly cause

symptoms of IBS include fatty foods, gas-producing foods, wheat, red meats, eggs, alcohol, caffeine, lactose, and fibre (especially insoluble fibre - see dietary fibre section on the next page). If your symptoms do not improve when you avoid these you may add them back into your diet.

- Foods that contain large amounts of fructose may cause gas. Fructose is used to sweeten many soft drinks and fruit drinks. Fruit juice can also have high amounts of fructose. Try limiting the amount of juice you drink. Eat fruit instead.
- Foods sweetened with sorbitol may cause gas. Sorbitol is used as a sugar substitute in some candies and diet products. Sorbitol occurs naturally in some fruit juices.
- Although lactose intolerance can cause symptoms of loose stools, bloating, pain and gas, it is not more common in people with IBS than in the general population. Lactose intolerance is when a person cannot digest lactose (the natural sugar found in milk). Talk with your doctor if you think you have lactose intolerance.
- Limit the amount of caffeine you have because it may stimulate and irritate your GI tract. Health Canada suggests that adults have no more than 3 cups of coffee each day. For information about the effects of caffeine and the amounts of caffeine in foods, see Health Canada's "It's Your Health - Caffeine" <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/caffeine-eng.php> and "Caffeine in Food" <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/addit/caf/food-caf-aliments-eng.php>. You may wish to avoid caffeine completely to see if your symptoms improve.

Dietary fibre

It is unclear if increasing the amount of dietary fibre in your diet will help relieve IBS symptoms. Soluble fibre may provide symptom relief, while insoluble fibre does not appear to help and may actually make symptoms worse for some people.

- Soluble fibre is found in oats, oat bran, barley, rye, lentils and dried beans and psyllium.
- Insoluble fibre is found in wheat bran, bran cereals and whole grain products (whole wheat bread and pasta, and brown rice).

Other healthy lifestyle tips

- Reduce stress. If you have trouble handling the stress in your life, ask your doctor for help.
- Exercise regularly and get enough sleep.

Be sure to monitor your symptoms and discuss any concerns, discomfort or pain with your doctor.



Additional Resources

- For more information on increasing fibre, see "What is Fibre and Why is it Good for Me?" www.dietitians.ca/resources/resourcesearch.asp?fn=view&contentid=4999
- Canadian Society of Intestinal Research (CSIR) www.badgut.com
1-866-600-4875.

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