



Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) - Nutrition Considerations

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is defined as abdominal discomfort associated with altered bowel habits such as constipation, diarrhea, bloating, or urgency.

- ◆ IBS is the most common disorder diagnosed by gastroenterologists, as well as the most common disorder seen by primary care physicians. It is estimated that approximately 10-15% of the world's population has IBS.
- ◆ **There is no known cure for IBS.** However, individuals may find relief with treatments specific to their symptoms.
- ◆ **Symptoms vary from person to person.** Each individual experiences different symptoms and tolerates different foods.
- ◆ **Food allergies (symptoms caused by an immune response) are rarely the culprit in IBS patients.** Most IBS patients with food-related symptoms have food sensitivities or intolerances, which are not caused by an immune response.
- ◆ *A few* individuals with IBS symptoms may have specific food-related conditions including lactose intolerance and celiac disease.
- ◆ Keeping a food journal will help you to log the foods you do not tolerate, and the symptoms you experience.
- ◆ Life stressors, such as employment changes, travel, relocation, uncomfortable social situations, or illness can trigger or worsen symptoms.
- ◆ A number of other factors may also worsen symptoms, such as excessive use of laxatives or antidiarrheal drugs, lack of regular sleep, and inadequate fluid intake.

The suggestions below have been helpful in some individuals to alleviate IBS symptoms. To determine what does and does not work for you, make only one change at a time.

Diet Suggestions for IBS:

- **Try smaller, more frequent meals**
- **High-fat, greasy, rich foods are typically not as well tolerated.** Try eating a lower-fat diet. Some easy ways to reduce fat intake include:
 - Select lean meats (fish, turkey, chicken) - bake or grill.
 - Choose fat low-fat or non-fat dairy products (milk, soymilk, yogurt, cheese)
 - Cook with cooking spray, instead of butter or vegetable oil.

- **Try a reduced lactose diet.** Lactose is found in certain dairy products. If symptoms improve and you plan on continuing this diet long term, it is very important to get calcium and vitamin D from other food sources or supplements including naturally low lactose dairy products. These include low or fat free yogurt, as well as hard cheeses (however these have a higher fat content). The fat in some dairy products rather than lactose can also be a factor contributing to IBS symptoms.
- **Try reducing the amount of highly gas producing foods and less readily absorbed natural sugars** in your diet. Some individuals feel benefit from a low FODMAP (Fermentable Oligo- Di and Mono-saccharides and Polyols) diet (see FODMAP handout for more details). Some groups of foods that you may try excluding are:
 - Apples, pears, oranges, pineapples, melons (high fructose)
 - Onions, leeks, asparagus, artichokes (vegetables containing fructans)
 - Wheat-based products
 - Sugar alcohols (such as sorbitol or mannitol). They are used in many sugar-free gums, candy, and medicine (unfortunately, it is not always listed on the medicine label, so you will have to ask your pharmacist).
 - Legumes, lentils, cabbage, brussel sprouts (contain raffinose)
- For some individuals, certain foods, such as caffeine (coffee, tea, soda), chocolate, and alcohol, may trigger IBS symptoms.
- Foods and supplements containing soluble fibers are better tolerated than the insoluble ones (see table on next page for foods rich in soluble fiber). Slowly adding soluble fiber to your diet may alleviate some of your symptoms – Remember to drink plenty of fluids as you gradually increase the fiber content of your diet.

Alternative Therapies and IBS:

Alternative therapies, such as probiotics and herbal supplements, are sometimes used by patients with IBS. Kefir and certain yogurts contain natural probiotics. Below is a list of herbal and natural therapies that have been studied. Discuss any supplements you are taking with your physician and dietitian.

- **Peppermint oil** — there is some evidence supporting a benefit for peppermint oil. Some studies have shown improvement of symptoms with enteric coated peppermint oil capsules (0.2-0.4ml per capsule in doses of 3-6 capsules daily). Peppermint oil may cause or worsen heartburn in some.
- **Probiotics** — there is increasing interest in the possible beneficial effects of so called "healthy" bacteria in a variety of intestinal diseases including IBS. Whether supplements containing these bacteria (such as acidophilus with or without fructo-oligosaccharides "FOS" or Lactobacillus) are of any benefit is unproven.
- **Chamomile tea** — Chamomile tea is of unproven benefit in IBS.

- **Evening primrose oil** — Evening primrose oil, a supplement containing gamma linolenic acid, is of unproven benefit.
- **Fennel seeds** — Fennel seeds are of unproven benefit.
- **Wormwood** — Wormwood is of unproven benefit and may be unsafe. Wormwood oil can cause damage to the nervous system.
- **Comfrey** — Comfrey is of unproven benefit and can cause serious liver problems.

Additional Resources:

- ◆ Other resources available at the University of Virginia Health System, GI Nutrition website (www.GInutrition.virginia.edu):
 - FODMAP Diet (low fructose and poorly digested carbohydrates) Handout
 - Reduced Lactose Handout
 - [Clinical ramifications of fructose malabsorption of fructose and other short-chain carbohydrates \(Practical Gastroenterology series\)](#)
 - [Association Providing Support for Patients with Digestive Diseases](#)
- ◆ International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) Inc: www.iffgd.org
- ◆ IBS Self Help and Support Group: www.ibsgroup.org
- ◆ National Institute of Diabetes & Digestion & Kidney Diseases: www.niddk.nih.gov

Foods Rich in Soluble Fiber

Food	Amount	Soluble Fiber (grams)
Vegetables		
Asparagus	2/3 cup	2
Baked potato with skin	1 small	1
Broccoli/carrots	½ cup	1
Collard greens	1 cup	3
Green beans	½ cup	1
Sweet peas	½ cup	1.5
Sweet potato with skin	1 small	1.5
Fruits		
Mango	½ small	1.7
Apricots, dried	7 halves	1.1
Apricots, fresh	1 small	1
Banana	1 medium	1
Grapefruit	½ medium	1
Nectarine	1 medium	1
Orange/pear/tangerine	1 medium	2
Peach/Plum	1 medium	1

Food	Amount	Soluble Fiber (grams)
Legumes		
Lima beans	1 cup	3
Garbanzo beans	½ cup	1
Grains		
Brown rice	½ cup	0.4
Cheerios	1 cup	1
Oatmeal (dry)	1/3 cup	2
Oatmeal (instant)	1 packet	1.5
Raisin bran	1 cup	1.3
Whole-wheat bread	1 slice	0.4
White bread	1 slice	0.2