

Patient advice sheet

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) guide

What is IBS?

IBS is irritable bowel syndrome, symptoms of which can include constipation or diarrhoea, bloating and abdominal pain. IBS is diagnosed once other conditions have been excluded. It is sometimes triggered by the foods we eat. For this reason we suggest considering how you can change your diet to address the most troubling symptom you experience. In this guide you will find advice on changes to your diet which can help you reduce each of the main symptoms noted above.

You may find it helpful to complete the symptom evaluation questionnaire before you begin. We strongly encourage you to carry out this advice at home for about 3-4 weeks. After making changes, complete the symptom questionnaire again. This should help you to evaluate if this guidance has helped.

If your symptoms persist despite changing your diet, you may wish to trial the low FODMAP diet. 'FODMAP' is an anagram for different fermentable fibres found within many foods, which might cause IBS symptoms in some people. For more details on a low FODMAP diet, please watch webinars 3 and 4 at the following link <https://patientwebinars.co.uk/condition/ibs/webinars/> or discuss this with your dietitian.

It's also important to note that if you notice a food is triggering your IBS symptoms, for example if you are experiencing stomach cramps after a particular food, you are not causing any physical harm to your gut by continuing to eat that food. This is your choice and the symptoms will pass.

If you have been diagnosed with IBS but develop any new symptoms, such as unexplained weight loss or blood in the stool, please see your GP to discuss this.

General tips

- **Regular meals:** Your digestion can become overwhelmed by large meals or eating most of our daily intake over only a few hours. Try to spread out your meals over the day aiming for 3 meals and 2 snacks.
- **Increasing fluids:** Fluids are important to help pass a soft stool if constipated and to replenish fluid lost through loose stools. Aim for at least 2 litres or 4 pints a day of fluids, including water, squash, juice, tea and coffee or milk based drinks.
- **Probiotics:** You may wish to consider trying a probiotic. These come in many different types and concentrations. We advise a trial of 4 weeks. If you have not noticed an improvement by then, it is unlikely that continuing will provide a benefit. See further information under 'constipation' and 'diarrhoea' for guidance on which probiotics to choose.
- **Alcohol:** You may find that alcohol is a trigger for your symptoms. There is no safe amount of alcohol to take, and any reduction may be beneficial for IBS, but also for your overall health.

- **Make changes one by one**, alongside keeping a food diary to help track your progress. See our separate food and mood diary template to help get started. You may find that symptoms worsen or improve for no apparent reason, and keeping a food diary is usually the best way to pinpoint potential triggers. Also consider non dietary triggers, such as stress (page 2).
- **Dietary exclusions:** If you feel that, after tracking your symptoms, a particular food group such as lactose products or wheat are causing your issues, you may wish to try a short elimination (perhaps for a few weeks). It is important that you replace these foods with appropriate alternatives. For example, you could choose a lactose free or plant based milk instead of cow's milk, if you are excluding lactose. Make sure this is calcium enriched. It is also important that, if you find no benefit, you promptly reintroduce these foods at the end of the trial.

IBS can be a frustrating and often isolating experience. If you feel you would benefit from support, or would like further trusted information on IBS, please see the 'other useful resources/websites' on page 6.

The following 4 sections cover the symptoms that you may have with IBS and actions that you may try to relieve these symptoms

1 Stress and mental health

There are definite connections between the gut and the brain (called the gut-brain axis). IBS has recently been classified as a disorder of gut-brain interaction, which is why you may have been suggested to take a low dose anti-depressant by your Doctor, to help reduce your IBS symptoms.

Mental health can play a significant part in IBS symptoms. Addressing stress in your life can complement changes made to your diet, and stress may even be the main cause of your symptoms.

The following holistic treatments may be useful for helping to manage IBS:

- Gut directed hypnotherapy
- Yoga (2 hours per week of hatha yoga)
- Deep breathing
- Meditation
- IBS specific cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Movement or exercise is also recommended to help manage IBS, which may be linked to it's mental health benefits. Try to find some form of movement that you enjoy, it all counts!

If you are interested in gut directed hypnotherapy or CBT, speak with your GP or consultant about the services which are available in your area.

If you do start any of the above interventions, jotting this down in your food diary may help you identify what works to help manage your symptoms.

For more advice on stress relief you can contact [Be Healthy Bucks](https://bhb.maximusuk.co.uk/) (https://bhb.maximusuk.co.uk/) by self-referring online or by calling 03332 300177

2 Constipation

In addition to the general tips, you may find these tips useful:

Activity

Movement is important to help get things moving internally, try to bear this in mind and remember that everything counts, even if it's not classed as conventional exercise!

Fibre

Both having too much and too little fibre can cause bowel symptoms. If you do not eat many wholegrain options or fruits and vegetables, you may benefit from increasing these in your diet. However, try to avoid adding additional **wheat bran** into your diet (e.g. bran flakes, Weetabix), as this is high in insoluble fibre, which may worsen any accompanying symptoms of abdominal pain or bloating. See the 'quick fibre guide' for more information.

Soluble fibre

Instead, try to focus on increasing your intake of soft fruits, vegetables, oats and linseeds to help boost your intake of **soluble fibre**. Soluble fibre forms a gel in the gut, which helps to soften hard stools, and also helps to manage loose stools. Increasing your intake of soluble fibre can help with abdominal pain and bloating, and it's also a **prebiotic**. This provides food for the good bacteria in the colon, which could help in IBS. Soluble fibre supplements such as psyllium/ispaghula husk are available from most health food shops or online and you could also try products such as Optifibre or Fybogel. Start with a small dose (for example, 1 tsp/day) and increase this gradually.

Linseeds For constipation you can try adding up to 2 tablespoons of linseeds a day to cereal or yogurt, salads or soups. Start with 1 tsp and increase gradually, making sure you have at least 150ml of fluids at the same meal as the linseeds.

Respond to your body's cues Where possible, try to respond to the urge to open your bowels when it occurs. Holding it in will cause more water to be absorbed and make the stool harder to pass. How you position yourself on the toilet is also important and this will help make it as easy as possible for you to pass a stool—see the diagram.

Probiotics for constipation

You might find Activia yoghurts (Danone) helpful in the following portion: 125g pot x 2 per day (trial for 1 month). Alflorex capsules are a lactose free option, and are available at some UK pharmacies or online (trial period 4-12 weeks) from <https://precisionbiotics.ie>



3 Diarrhoea

Caffeinated drinks: (Tea, coffee, energy drinks). We recommend you limit these to 2-3 cups a day, as caffeine is a bowel stimulant which can worsen loose stools. Decaffeinated versions can be consumed freely instead. If you want to switch to decaff, try to do this gradually to avoid caffeine withdrawal symptoms such as headaches.

High fat foods: Large or frequent amounts of high fat foods (such as fried foods, full fat dairy products, chocolate), can lead to loose stools. Consider opting for lower fat options to see if this has any effect.

Soluble fibre: This type of fibre, found in oats, some seeds and fruits/vegetables forms a gel in the gut, which helps to soften hard stools, and also helps to manage loose stools. Increasing intake of soluble fibre can help with abdominal pain and bloating, and it's also a **prebiotic**. This provides food for the good bacteria in the colon, which could help in IBS. Soluble fibre supplements such as psyllium/ispaghula husk are available from most health food shops or online and you could also try products such as Optifibre or Fybogel. Start with a small dose (for example, 1 tsp/day) and increase this gradually.

Insoluble fibre: Whilst keeping some soluble fibre in your diet, you may wish to decrease intake of insoluble fibre, which is found in skins of fruits and veg and wholemeal cereals, particularly wheat bran (e.g. bran flakes, Weetabix). This may worsen loose stools, pain or bloating. To decrease total/insoluble fibre intake whilst keeping soluble fibre in your diet, see the 'quick fibre guide' to help.

Probiotics for diarrhoea:

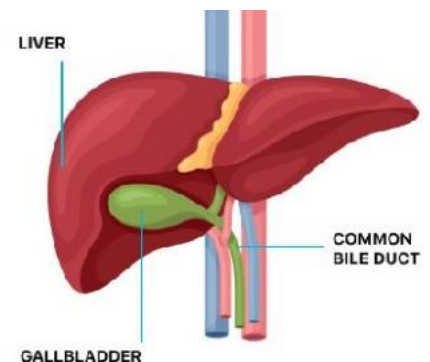
Alflorex capsules can be effective in managing diarrhoea and are available from most UK pharmacies or online (<https://precisionbiotics.ie>), the recommended trial period is 4-12 weeks. Symprove is another option and has shown benefit after 12 weeks and is available from <https://www.symprove.com>. The company sometimes offers a free trial. Both of these options are lactose free.

Bile acid malabsorption (BAM):

The British Society of Gastroenterology suggests that up to 1/3 of people diagnosed with diarrhoea predominant IBS, could have BAM, which isn't routinely tested for.

Bile, produced by our liver and stored in our gallbladder, helps us to digest fat. This is released into the gut when we eat and should be reabsorbed by the gut further down. But in some people, this reabsorption does not occur, and can lead to frequent loose stools (sometimes at night) which may be yellow/green or oily and associated with wind and bloating.

This can happen in anyone but is more likely in patients who have had a cholecystectomy (gallbladder removal surgery) or who have had part of their small bowel removed. If you feel this could be a cause of your symptoms, please see your GP or gastroenterologist to discuss this. They may wish to send you for a test, or trial a medication that can help with BAM.



4 Bloating and abdominal pain

People with IBS are more likely to have **visceral hypersensitivity**, which is when the gut is much more sensitive to the sensation of being stretched by the presence of gas inside the bowel, which then causes pain. To help manage this, you might find the following tips helpful:

Linseeds/flaxseeds: You can try adding up to 2 tablespoons of linseeds a day to cereal or yogurt, salads or soups. Start with a small amount of 1 tsp and build this up gradually. Have at least 150ml of fluids at the same meal as the seeds.

Fibre and bloating

If you are bloated and also constipated, you may benefit from an increase in total fibre intake. If you are bloated with loose stools, you may benefit from a slight reduction in your total fibre intake, but still consider keeping sources of soluble fibre, such as those discussed below, and in the 'quick fibre guide'.

Soluble fibre: Increase your intake of soft fruits, vegetables, oats and seeds (such as linseeds or chia seeds) to help boost your intake of soluble fibre. This may help with abdominal pain and bloating, and it's also a **prebiotic**. This provides food for the good bacteria in the colon, which could help in IBS. Soluble fibre supplements such as psyllium/ispaghula husk are available from most health food shops or online and you could also try products such as Optifibre or Fybogel. Start with a small dose (for example, 1 tsp/day) and increase this gradually.

Avoid fizzy drinks/straws: Fizzy drinks or the use of straws introduces further gas into the bowel, which increases bloating. Try to limit these, let them sit for a while before you drink them, and drink slowly.

Eating slowly: When we are rushed or eating quickly, we tend to swallow much more air which can then cause bloating. Slowing down to enjoy your meal without distractions, where possible, can be a useful way to help prevent bloating.

Advice and tools

Please also refer to our information and templates on:

- **Symptom evaluation questionnaire**
- **Food and mood diary template**
- **Quick fibre guide**

Other useful resources

The IBS network: www.theibsnetwork.org

The national charity for IBS. Useful information about self-management, peer support and a self-care programme

Guts UK: <https://gutscharity.org.uk>

A UK charity funding research into the digestive system with trusted information, support and awareness campaigns

National key scheme: www.nks.co.uk

Provide a key to unlock disabled loos all over the country, for peace of mind when travelling

About our patient information

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. Please follow our infection prevention and control guidelines when visiting our healthcare sites. Further information is available on our website.

Patient Advice Sheet

If you would like a copy of this information on audiotape, **in large print** or translated, please call the Patient Advice Liaison Service on 01296 831120 or email bht.pals@nhs.net