



Nutrition Considerations for the Patient with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

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

IBS Facts:

- It is estimated that approximately 10-15 % of the population has **IBS**;
- It is the most common disease diagnosed by gastroenterologists;
- The most common disorder seen by primary care physicians.
- There is no known cause or cure for **IBS**; each person experiences different symptoms and will likely tolerate different foods.
- Food allergies are rare and most **IBS** patients have food sensitivities (symptoms not due to the immune system).
- Some 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. The suggestions below are things to consider helping alleviate your **IBS** symptoms.

Diet Suggestions for IBS:

- Try smaller, frequent meals
- High-fat, greasy, rich foods are typically less tolerated. Try eating a lower-fat diet, selecting baked or grilled meats, low fat and light foods.
- Try a lactose free 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 (yoghurt and hard cheeses). The fat in some dairy products rather than lactose can also be a factor contributing to **IBS** symptoms.
- These foods can make **IBS** symptoms worse: caffeine (coffee, tea, soda), chocolate, and alcohol.
- Try reducing the amount of fructose, the sugar found in fruit and honey, or fructans (found in artichoke, green beans, leeks, onions and wheat).
- Sorbitol is the sugar alcohol 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). Sorbitol can increase gas and bloating.
- Some foods commonly reported to also cause gas and bloating include: beans, onions, celery, carrots, raisins, bananas, apricots, prunes, brussel sprouts, wheat germ, pretzels, and bagels.
- Fiber supplements that are made from soluble fibers are better tolerated than the insoluble fiber containing supplements (e.g., Citrucel over Metamucil for example).
- Slowly adding soluble fiber to your diet may alleviate some of your symptoms-examples include: oats, potatoes, peas, beans, and barley. Attached is a table of foods and the amount of soluble fiber contained in them. Remember to drink plenty of fluids as you gradually increase the fiber content of your diet.

Alternative Therapies and IBS:

Alternative therapies are sometimes used by patients with **IBS**. Some of these common therapies include: probiotics, hypnosis, and herbals. Kefir and yogurt contain natural probiotics. Below is a list of herbals and natural therapies. Unfortunately there is no good evidence supporting their benefit.

- Peppermint oil – there is a small amount of evidence supporting a benefit for peppermint oil, although it is difficult to make definitive conclusions. Peppermint oil can cause or worsen heartburn.
- Acidophilus – 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 fructooligosaccharides “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 if of unproven benefits and can cause serious liver problems.

Additional Resources:

- ❖ National Institute of Diabetes, & Digestion, & Kidney Diseases: www.niddk.nih.gov.
- ❖ International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) Inc: www.iffgd.org
- ❖ Irritable Bowel Association: www.ibsassociation.org