



## 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](http://www.niddk.nih.gov).
- ❖ International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) Inc: [www.iffgd.org](http://www.iffgd.org)
- ❖ Irritable Bowel Association: [www.ibsassociation.org](http://www.ibsassociation.org)