



# Healthy Eating & Lifestyle Advice

FOR IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

# CONTENTS

WHAT IS IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME?	P. 3
HOW COMMON IS IBS?	P. 3
WHAT CAUSES IBS?	P. 4
HOW IS IBS DIAGNOSED?	P. 5
HOW IS IBS TREATED?	P. 7
HEALTHY EATING ADVICE FOR IBS	P. 8
OTHER DIETARY CONSIDERATIONS	P. 10
LIFESTYLE ADVICE FOR IBS	P. 12
PERSISTING SYMPTOMS	P. 13
SUPPORT & ADVICE	P. 14

THIS BOOKLET PROVIDES A SIMPLE INTRODUCTION TO IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME (IBS) AND GENERAL DIET AND LIFESTYLE ADVICE THAT MAY HELP IMPROVE SYMPTOMS.

## WHAT IS IBS?

IBS is a medical term used to describe a collection of gut symptoms not explained by any other disease. Symptoms can include diarrhoea, constipation, bloating, abdominal pain, cramping and wind. These can vary from person to person and also in the same person at different times, often in response to changes in diet, lifestyle or stress levels.

There are different types of IBS which are classified according to the main symptom. These include: IBS-D (where diarrhoea is the main symptom), IBS-C (where constipation is the main symptom), IBS-M (where symptoms are mixed) and IBS-U (unspecified). IBS-D is the most common type affecting more than 50% of people with IBS.

IBS can have a significant impact on the quality of life of those with the condition. Around half of those with IBS have been found to suffer from anxiety or depression.

## HOW COMMON IS IBS?

IBS is one of the most common gut-related reasons for people to visit their GP. It is thought to affect up to 20% of the UK population and is most commonly diagnosed in women aged between 30-50 years. It usually develops in early adulthood and persists on and off throughout life.



## WHAT CAUSES IBS?

The cause of IBS is not fully understood. Studies have shown that the gut of people with IBS tends to be more sensitive and reactive. A hectic lifestyle, anxiety and stress can all affect the gut which may increase symptoms.

For some people, IBS may follow a serious stomach bug (gastroenteritis) or a course of strong antibiotics to treat other conditions. Others may develop IBS following a traumatic life event or change.

## HOW IS IBS DIAGNOSED?

There is no test to diagnose IBS. Symptoms can be very similar to other gastrointestinal (gut) conditions and so before a diagnosis of IBS is confirmed, it is important that other serious gastrointestinal conditions such as coeliac disease, inflammatory bowel disease, as well as other bowel and gynaecological conditions, are first ruled out.

- If you have any **“red flag”** symptoms that are not usually associated with IBS, it is important to consult your GP in the first instance.

If your symptoms are relieved by defaecation (going for a poo), or are associated with a change in your bowel habits, then a diagnosis of IBS should be considered once all other possible causes have been ruled out.

## RED FLAG SYMPTOMS

- Change in bowel habit to looser and/or more frequent stools persisting for more than six weeks in a person aged over 60 years
- Passing blood from the back passage
- Unintentional and unexplained weight loss
- Family history of bowel or ovarian cancer

## WHAT TESTS MIGHT MY GP DO?

Your GP should perform a simple blood test to screen for coeliac disease, an autoimmune condition with similar symptoms to IBS. In addition, other tests may be undertaken to rule out other conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease. Following a full assessment your GP may refer you to a gastroenterologist (a specialist in bowel disorders) at the local hospital for further investigations or advice.

## WHAT IS COELIAC DISEASE?

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition caused by an intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. Symptoms of IBS can be very similar to those of coeliac disease. It is important to rule out a diagnosis of coeliac disease prior to a diagnosis of IBS being confirmed. **It is vital that you continue to eat a gluten-containing diet while you are being tested for coeliac disease** (consuming gluten in more than one meal a day for at least 6 weeks prior to testing and throughout the diagnostic process).

A diagnosis of IBS is made if the abdominal pain that is either relieved by opening your bowels or is associated with altered stool frequency or form is present with at least two of the following;

- Altered stool passage
- Abdominal bloating
- Symptoms made worse by eating
- Passage of mucus

Other symptoms including lethargy, nausea, backache and bladder symptoms are common in people with IBS and can be used to support the diagnosis.

## HOW IS IBS TREATED?

There is no single effective treatment for IBS. A healthy diet and lifestyle may improve symptoms. Many people with IBS report symptoms worsen after eating. If a dietary cause is suspected then your GP or practice nurse may give you some general dietary and lifestyle advice to try as a first step. Your GP or pharmacist may suggest various types of medication that could help to reduce symptoms.



## HEALTHY EATING ADVICE FOR IBS

The following recommendations and tips may help to improve IBS symptoms.

Eat three regular meals a day	Avoid long gaps between meals and space evenly through the day. Smaller meal sizes may help symptoms.
Try not to skip meals, eat too quickly or eat late at night	Take time to chew your food well and relax over meal-times.
Limit alcohol intake	Limit to no more than two units per day and have at least two alcohol-free days a week
Reduce intake of caffeine-containing drinks	Limit to no more than 3 cups per day. Switch to decaffeinated or caffeine-free varieties
Drink at least 8 cups of fluid per day (1.5-2 litres a day)	Especially water or other still, non-caffeinated drinks e.g. herbal teas. Limit fizzy, caffeinated and alcoholic drinks as these may worsen your symptoms. A good guide to whether you have an adequate fluid intake is to check the colour of your urine- a pale straw colour is ideal.
Cut down on rich or fatty foods	These foods may increase IBS symptoms. It is also recommended to limit high-fat foods as part of a healthy diet. Use less oil, butter, spreads, creamy sauces & dressings and choose low-fat alternatives. Include fewer fatty foods in your diet e.g. chips, crisps, cakes, biscuits, sausages, burgers and pastry products. Grilling, poaching, steaming, boiling and baking are healthier alternatives to frying
Reduce your intake of manufactured foods	Cook from fresh ingredients where possible
Limit fresh fruit to three portions per day	<b>A portion is:</b> - 80g of fruit - 150ml of fruit/vegetable juice



# OTHER DIETARY CONSIDERATIONS

Additional advice may help with specific symptoms and is outlined below.

<p><b>If symptoms include bloating &amp; wind</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit intake of foods known to cause wind e.g. beans and pulses, sprouts, cauliflower and sugar-free foods such as mints or chewing gum</li> <li>• Oats might be helpful e.g. oat-based breakfast cereal or porridge. Linseeds may also improve symptoms (take up to two tablespoons per day)</li> </ul>
<p><b>If symptoms include constipation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to gradually increase your fibre intake- any sudden increase may make symptoms worse. Ensure you increase your fluid intake as well.</li> <li>• Good sources of fibre include wholegrains, oats, vegetables, fruit and linseeds (see: Where is fibre found?). These foods will help to soften stools and make them easier to pass</li> <li>• Try adding two tablespoons per day of golden or brown linseeds (whole or ground) to breakfast cereal, yoghurt, soup or on a salad. Have a small glass (150ml) of fluid with each tablespoons of linseeds taken. It can take several months to see a benefit.</li> <li>• Avoid eating extra wheat bran as this can aggravate symptoms</li> </ul>
<p><b>If symptoms include diarrhoea</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drink plenty to replace lost fluids</li> <li>• Limit your caffeine intake from tea, coffee and soft drinks to three drinks per day</li> <li>• Try reducing intake of high-fibre foods such as wholewheat breakfast cereals and breads</li> <li>• Avoid sugar-free foods containing sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol e.g. sugar-free drinks, mints, gum</li> </ul>

# WHERE IS FIBRE FOUND?

Dietary fibre is found in many foods including:

- Cereals such as wheat, barley, rye, corn, rice and cereal products such as bread, breakfast cereals and pasta. Wholemeal or wholegrain varieties will contain the most fibre.
- Beans, lentil, pulses
- Fruit and vegetables
- Nuts and seeds

As fibre affects the firmness of your stools and how often you pass them, changing your fibre intake can help IBS symptoms. The amount of fibre you need varies depending on your symptoms and current fibre intake.



# PROBIOTICS & IBS

Probiotic products contain 'friendly' or 'good' bacteria which may help IBS symptoms. These are available in yoghurt, fermented milk drinks, powder or supplement form. It is important to be aware that some will contain ingredients that might cause IBS symptoms to worsen. If you decide to try a probiotic product, take it daily for at least four weeks at the manufacturer-recommended dose to see if it improves your symptoms.



## LIFESTYLE ADVICE

Stress and anxiety can trigger IBS symptoms. Simple ways to try to relax and reduce these factors include:

- Take regular exercise such as walking, swimming or cycling
- Try relaxation techniques such as meditation or yoga
- Hypnotherapy or behavioural therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) may also be beneficial.

If you are considering hypnotherapy ensure you choose a member of the British Medical Hypnotherapy Association to provide this.

Your GP will be able to provide you with more information on CBT.

If you continue to experience stress or anxiety, make an appointment with your GP for further advice.

## PERSISTING SYMPTOMS

It is important to give yourself time to adjust to any of the general diet and lifestyle changes you make. If your symptoms continue to persist despite these changes, ask your GP to refer you to a dietitian with expertise in the dietary management of IBS.

Depending on your symptoms and history, a dietitian may suggest that you trial a diet that is low in short-chain fermentable carbohydrates (also known as the 'low FODMAP diet') which can improve symptoms of IBS. This is a complex diet and should only be followed under the guidance of a low FODMAP-trained dietitian.

If you think certain foods such as wheat or dairy-containing foods trigger your symptoms, ask your GP to refer you to a dietitian for more support in identifying and removing possible 'trigger' foods. It is important to receive expert advice before removing whole food groups from your diet, this will ensure you are still getting all the right nutrients needed for good health. Keeping a food and symptom diary may help you identify links between what you are eating and your symptoms. A dietitian might use this to help them provide appropriate dietary advice.

Further information and advice on more specialised dietary treatment for IBS can be found in the 'Low FODMAP Diet for Irritable Bowel Syndrome' booklet.



## SUPPORT & ADVICE



**The IBS Network-** The national charity for those living with IBS provides a unique self-care programme to support people with the condition. The Charity also offers a telephone helpline with trained nurses and an Ask the experts service via email, monthly newsletters and a quarterly magazine Gut reaction, a range of factsheets and gut friendly recipes. Become a member and receive a 'can't wait' card to help gain access to public toilet facilities.

Helpline: 0114 272 3253  
[info@theibsnetwork.org](mailto:info@theibsnetwork.org)  
[www.theibsnetwork.org](http://www.theibsnetwork.org)

## SCHÄR

is a gluten-free food manufacturer and is committed to supporting those with special dietary needs. With decades of experience and a team of expert food technologists and health professionals, the Schär range offers a wide selection of tasty and high-quality ambient, chilled and frozen products and is available in leading retailers. Schär also provide a range of staple low FODMAP certified products to support those following a low FODMAP diet. Further information on a low FODMAP diet for the management of IBS symptoms can be found on the website.

Careline: 0800 161 5838  
[share@schar.co.uk](mailto:share@schar.co.uk)  
[www.schar.co.uk](http://www.schar.co.uk)





