

Department of
Nutrition & Dietetics

Dietary Management of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)



Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

IBS is a common disorder that affects the intestines. The symptoms of IBS include:



Bloating



Abdominal pain
("stomach" pain)



Changes in bowel
movements (diarrhoea
and / or constipation)

The cause of IBS is not known. If you have IBS, you should not eat foods that will trigger your symptoms. Changing your diet can help you improve your symptoms.

What Changes Can I Make to My Diet?

- Have your meals regularly and take your time to eat them. Chew your food thoroughly.
- Ensure that you are adequately hydrated. Drink at least eight cups of fluid per day.
- Do not eat large meals late at night.
- Limit the amount of caffeine you take. Do not drink more than three cups of coffee and tea per day.



Coffee



Tea

- Reduce intake of foods that cause your IBS symptoms to worsen such as:



Spicy food



Fatty /
processed food



Alcohol



Carbonated
drinks

What Changes Can I Make to My Diet?

- Limit your intake of milk and dairy products if you are lactose intolerant*. When you are on a low lactose diet, ensure that you take enough calcium to maintain healthy bones through other sources. Other sources of calcium include:



Lactose-free milk



Tofu made with calcium salts such as tau kwa



Fish with edible bones such as ikan bilis and sardines

**Lactose is a natural sugar found in animal's milk (such as cow's milk and goat's milk). People with lactose intolerance cannot break down lactose properly, causing discomfort in the stomach.*

Dietary Changes to Manage Specific IBS Symptoms

If you experience these symptoms, you can change your diet in the following ways:

BLOATING

- Take less foods that produce gas (e.g. beans, lentils, cabbage, cauliflower).
- Take less foods and drinks that contain artificial sweeteners (e.g. sugar-free mints).
- Eat slowly. Eating or drinking too quickly will cause you to swallow air, making you feel bloated.
- Drink from a cup instead of through a straw.
- You can eat oats and linseeds to help reduce bloating. You can choose either option one or two.
 1. Add one tablespoon of linseeds per day to foods (e.g. soup, cereal).
 2. Mix one tablespoon of linseeds with every 150ml of fluid for a trial of three months.



Oats



Linseeds

Dietary Management to Manage Specific IBS Symptoms

DIARRHOEA

- When you have diarrhoea, you lose fluid from your body. Drink sufficient fluids to replenish the fluids you lost.
- Eat less high fibre foods (e.g. wheat bran, whole wheat bread).
- Avoid food and drinks that contain artificial sweeteners. Examples of artificial sweeteners are sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol.

CONSTIPATION

- Slowly increase the amount of fibre you take in. Sources of fibre include oats, fruit, vegetables and wholegrain products.



- You can add one tablespoon of linseeds per day to foods (e.g. soup, cereal) or mix one tablespoon of linseeds with every 150ml of fluid for a trial of three months.
- Drink at least eight cups of fluids daily, especially water or non-alcohol drinks.

Other Ways to Manage Your IBS Symptoms

On top of changing your diet, there are other things you can do to manage your IBS symptoms.



Keep a food and symptom diary to observe which foods improve or worsen your symptoms.



Taking medications as prescribed by your doctor can help to relieve your symptoms.



Doing activities to relieve stress and exercising regularly can help to improve your symptoms.

You may only see an improvement in your symptoms after some time as your bowels need time to adjust to changes in your diet and lifestyle.

If you continue to experience symptoms even after changing your diet and lifestyle, please request for a referral to a dietitian. Your dietitian will conduct nutrition assessments and may recommend you to take a low FODMAPs (**F**ermentable **O**ligo-saccharides, **D**i-saccharides, **M**ono-saccharides and **P**olyols) diet if indicated.

Low FODMAPs Diet

FODMAPs are groups of carbohydrates found in some foods. If you have IBS, your body cannot absorb FODMAPs properly. Eating food containing FODMAPs may trigger your IBS symptoms. Examples of foods with high amounts of FODMAPs:



Milk



Soy milk



Onion



Garlic



Wheat-based products such as bread, noodle, chapatti



Some types of fruits and vegetables such as apple, mango, watermelon, cauliflower, snow peas

You can get a more detailed list of foods with high amount of FODMAPs from your dietitian.

If your dietitian recommends a low FODMAPs diet, you should not eat any food that contains high amounts of FODMAPs for **three to six weeks**. After that, you can **slowly re-introduce** food with high amounts of FODMAPs to find out which foods are causing your IBS symptoms. Your dietitian will guide you through this process safely.

Important Points to Remember

- IBS is a long-term gastrointestinal disorder that can cause abdominal discomfort, bloating and changes in bowel movement.
- Having a healthy and balanced diet with simple changes to your diet can help to relieve your IBS symptoms.
- If you continue to experience symptoms even after changing your diet and lifestyle as recommended in this booklet, please request for a referral to see a dietitian to try out a low FODMAPs diet.





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