

Bloating, IBS



and a
healthy diet

About 20% of people think they have a 'food allergy' and make changes to their diet that are quite often unnecessary and usually not very helpful. In fact less than 1.5% of the population actually suffer from an adverse reaction to food. The problem is made much worse by well-meaning advice from celebrities and so called 'health gurus' who advise people to follow some very bizarre diets, often cutting out all sorts of everyday foods. Doctors and health professionals including dietitians and registered nutritionists are worried by the increasing trend of people following such advice and self-selecting strict diets for no proper medical reason. The problem is made worse by the fact that many of these diets are nutritionally inadequate and can lead to other problems.

IBS – the size of the problem

Around a third of people in the UK suffer some of the symptoms associated with IBS and for 1 in 10 people the symptoms are so bad they go to see a Doctor. The Doctor will usually run a series of tests to make sure there is no serious medical condition causing the symptoms. Sufferers then often have difficulty in finding help with controlling their symptoms and this is when there is a temptation to try any sort of remedy suggested.

IBS – the cause

We do not know what causes IBS, but we do know that symptoms come and go and that stress and diet may have a role to play. IBS sometimes develops after a bout of gastroenteritis, after a course of antibiotics or after surgery.

IBS – is it food?

There is no one dietary cause of IBS symptoms. Just as the symptoms vary from person to person, so can any dietary causes.

IBS type symptoms may be aggravated by a low intake of fluid, a low intake of dietary fibre, a poor diet in general, erratic eating habits, long gaps between meals and by smoking or drinking large amounts of alcohol or coffee on an empty stomach. Sometimes it is caused by an intolerance to one or more foods. There is no simple test to see what, if any, foods are involved [see opposite page].

IBS – the symptoms

The main symptoms of IBS can vary from mild to severe and include some of the following:

- Abdominal pain and spasm
- Diarrhoea – loose or ribbon-like motions
- Constipation – solid, rabbit pellet-like motions
- Alternating diarrhoea and constipation
- Abdominal bloating
- Rumbling and wind
- Sense of not complete emptying of bowels
- Urgency to go to the toilet

And sometimes nausea, tiredness, belching and vomiting.

Note – indigestion or feeling full or bloated in your stomach after eating is not IBS. IBS symptoms are usually lower in the abdomen.

Bowels – what's normal?

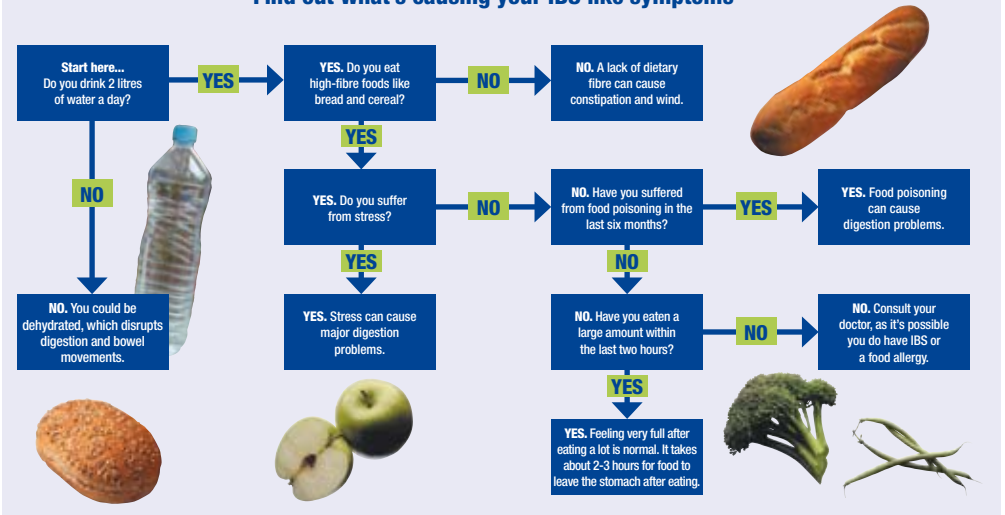
It's normal to open your bowels between 3 times a week and 3 times a day – anything more or less is not normal. Motions should be moist, solid and well formed, but easy to pass without straining.

That bloated feeling in the stomach – causes?

A survey by the Grain Information Service found that 20% of the population claim to suffer from bloating. Many believe that bloating is caused by irritable bowel syndrome or as a result of suffering from wheat intolerance. However the main causes of bloating were linked to hormone fluctuations (32%), over-eating/irregular meal patterns (28%) and stress related indigestion (27%). Many people feel bloated at lunch or in the evening, especially after a heavy meal. Recent weight gain also adds to discomfort after eating. Irregular meals, skipping meals and drinking a lot at meal times can really aggravate that bloated feeling. The answer is to try and spread your food and drinks more evenly over the day.

Some people find the bloating is worse after eating too much fruit, spicy food and fizzy carbonated drinks – all of which can cause gas and bloating. Cut down on these foods to stop the bloating. Being constipated can cause bloating and general discomfort in the abdomen. Constipation is usually linked to a lack of fluid and dietary fibre and can be greatly helped by drinking at least 8 – 10 cups or glasses of non-alcoholic drinks a day and eating more fibre containing food including wholemeal bread and high fibre foods like breakfast cereals.

Find out what's causing your IBS like symptoms



IBS – finding if food is the cause

Once your Doctor has ruled out any serious medical condition he may send you to a registered dietician for help in sorting out what you should or should not eat.

Keeping a food diary, which lists what you eat, drink and any symptoms can be used to pin point any foods that could be causing you a problem. The dietician may then suggest you change what you eat.

- This could be simply drinking more fluid and eating more fibre containing foods to see if treating constipation reduces the IBS type symptoms.
- Or the timing and size of your meals may be changed.
- Often a pro-biotic yoghurt or drink may be suggested – especially if you have been taking antibiotics or had gastroenteritis.
- If food intolerance is suspected an exclusion diet will be suggested – in 3 stages:

1. Exclusion stage – when you avoid the suspect food for 2-3 weeks, continuing to keep a food diary

2. Re-introduction or ‘testing’ stage – when you add back the avoided foods – one at a time – in normal serving sizes every day for 3 days. If symptoms return, then you should continue to exclude that food from your diet. If no reaction is noted, then add the food back into your diet.

[Please note we do not suggest testing any food thought to have triggered a serious allergic reaction]

3. Maintenance stage – continue avoiding foods known to cause a reaction, but making sure your diet is nutritionally adequate – the dietitian may suggest supplements – for example people avoiding milk and dairy products usually need to take a daily calcium supplement.

Avoided foods should be re-tested from time to time, as quite often in IBS, foods that were a problem can be eaten with no symptoms after a few months.

If you are having a bad IBS ‘attack’ it can seem as if all foods cause a problem. This reaction is probably because your bowel is so sensitive at this time and as the symptoms improve so will your ability to eat a wider range of foods.

Beware

- Following a strict exclusion diet long-term without follow-up
- Following a strict exclusion diet long term without ‘testing’
- Following an ‘allergy’ diet that makes you feel unwell
- Following an ‘allergy’ diet that causes rapid weight loss

Who can you trust?

It is well known that 'tests' carried out in health food shops, bought off the internet or carried out by some unqualified health practitioners or non-registered nutritionists are not reliable and frequently lead to incorrect results. This leads to people following unnecessarily strict diets. Even more worrying is that such tests and diets can delay the diagnosis and treatment of a real problem. Independent sources such as the British Dietetic Association and the Food Standards Agency advise consumers not to self-diagnose but to go and see their GP.

A GP survey found that 90% of GPs agree that women are putting their health at real risk by eliminating foods without any medical consultation and that questionable and potentially harmful advice by unregistered nutritionists is often to blame.

Where to get help?

How do you know who is the best person to talk to? Not all so-called 'experts' are actually qualified in nutrition and dietetics. When looking for someone to consult about a suspected food allergy, consult only the following:

- **A General Practitioner (GP)**
- **A Registered Dietitian:** qualified dietitians work for the NHS or in private practice and are usually accessed through your GP. All practicing dietitians must be Registered – look out for the letters RD after their name.
- **A Registered Nutritionist (RN):** registered nutritionists have a minimum degree level qualification in nutrition plus a minimum of 3 years experience.

Supporting research and further information

For a full copy of the *Grain Information Service IBS Survey (2005)* and the *GP Survey (2002)* and other references please call us on

020 7493 2521 or visit us at

www.wheatintolerance.co.uk

Useful contacts

The IBS Network

www.ibsnetwork.org.uk/information

British Nutrition Foundation

www.nutrition.org.uk

British Dietetic Association

www.bda.uk.com

Flour Advisory Bureau

www.fabflour.co.uk

CORE (previously digestive disorders foundation)

www.corecharity.org.uk

Grain Information Service

