

NUTRITION KEYNOTES

How to Eat If You Have Irritable Bowel Syndrome



Goal: To help control the constipation, diarrhea, and pain of irritable bowel syndrome with healthy food and lifestyle choices.

What Is Irritable Bowel Syndrome?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a chronic condition of unknown origin. It is most likely caused by bacterial overgrowth, inflammation, abnormal muscle contractions, or an over-sensitive colon or large intestine causing abdominal cramping, constipation, diarrhea, gas, and bloating. The effects of diet on IBS vary from person to person. Stress, depression, and certain foods can all make the symptoms worse depending on the cause of your IBS.

Foods or Supplements That May Help

- Eat **high-fiber foods** (25 to 35 grams a day) such as whole-grain breads and cereals; fruits; vegetables with the skin; and dried beans, peas, and lentils. If gas is a concern, eat fewer gas-producing foods (see list on back) or try Beano.
- **Bulk-forming laxatives** such as Metamucil and Konsyl (psyllium husk) or Benefiber help regulate bowel function, easing both constipation and diarrhea. Add fiber slowly to prevent gas and bloating.
- **Drink** at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day when you increase fiber.

- Look for **probiotics** (*acidophilus*, *Bifidobacterium infantis*) found in supplements and fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, or sauerkraut (with live bacteria).

Foods That May Cause Problems

Not everyone will need to stop eating all of these foods. Start with foods you know are a problem for you. Try eliminating these foods from your diet. Add one food back at a time every five days to see how you respond.

- **Lactose intolerance** is a common problem. Try lactose-free dairy; calcium-fortified soy, rice, or almond milk; Lactaid; or Dairy Ease.
- **Sugar and processed carbohydrates** such as honey, jams, jellies, candy, white rice, cakes, cookies, pastries, pie, donuts, white bread, other products made with white flour, and sweetened breakfast cereals.
- **Grape or prune juice**
- **Sugar alcohols** such as sorbitol, maltitol, mannitol, xylitol, hydrogenated starch hydrolysate, and fructose found in sugar-free and low-carb foods.

(over)

- **Wheat**—you may have gluten intolerance syndrome without actually having celiac disease.
- **Fatty foods** such as red meat, chicken with skin, whole dairy, oil, margarine, fried foods, or nuts.
- **Gas-producing foods** such as broccoli, brussels sprouts, corn, cabbage, cauliflower, eggs, garlic, cucumbers, onions, peppers, pickles, radishes, turnips, Swiss chard, raw apples, melons, dried beans, dried peas, dried lentils, carbonated beverages, and greasy or fatty foods.
- **Hot beverages**
- **Caffeine**—coffee, cola, tea, and chocolate.
- **Alcohol**

More Guidelines

- Keeping a food and mood diary will help you see what makes your symptoms worse and allow you to make changes to your diet and lifestyle.
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals. Do not skip meals.
- Chew food well.

- Eat slowly in a comfortable, relaxed environment.
- Avoid tobacco products.
- Because stress is a major contributor to IBS, it is important to manage it. Meditation, deep breathing, aerobic exercise, and sharing your concerns with someone can all help to decrease stress. Find a stress management class at kp.org/classes.
- Herbal supplements such as aloe can make irritable bowel symptoms worse.
- If simple carbohydrates are a problem, limit fruit to two servings a day.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups of water every day.
- If you change your diet and do not see improvement, ask your physician or dietitian for the FODMAP Diet.

For more information, please contact your registered dietitian or local Health Education Department.