

## Irritable bowel syndrome and diet



**NHS**  
National Institute for  
Health and Clinical Excellence

### What is irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)?

IBS is a very common condition. It describes a wide range of symptoms that vary from one person to another and can be worse for some people than others.

#### The most common symptoms are:

- wind and/or bloating
- diarrhoea or constipation, or both
- low abdominal pain, which may ease after opening the bowels or be accompanied by a change in bowel habit or stool appearance
- passing mucus
- feeling the need to open the bowels even after having just been to the toilet
- a feeling of urgency
- feeling that your symptoms are worse after eating.

#### If you have any of the following symptoms consult your doctor immediately:

unintentional and unexplained weight loss; rectal bleeding; a family history of bowel or ovarian cancer; if you are over 60 years old, a change in bowel habit to looser and/or more frequent stools for more than 6 weeks. Before attempting to manage symptoms via your diet, it is important to rule out other medical conditions, and to have a diagnosis established by your doctor or healthcare professional.

#### Ensure that you:

- eat regular meals
- do not skip meals or eat late at night
- take your time when eating meals
- sit down to eat and chew your food well
- take regular exercise – for example, walking, cycling or swimming
- make time to relax.

#### Helpful hints:

- keep a food and symptom diary to see if diet affects your symptoms. Remember symptoms may not be caused by the food you have just eaten, but what you ate earlier that day or the day before.
- give your bowels time to adjust to any changes that you make.

### Make changes according to your current symptoms

#### For symptoms of wind and bloating

- Limit fruit to 3 portions a day (including up to 1 portion of dried fruit if wanted) and fruit juice to 1 small glass a day. Remember to make up the recommended '5 a day' with vegetables.
- Try reducing your intake of resistant starches (see box below).
- Oats and golden linseeds may also help with symptoms of wind and bloating.
- If you wish to try 'probiotics' the information under 'symptoms of diarrhoea' overleaf may be useful.

#### How much is 1 portion of fruit or vegetables?

##### Fresh fruit = 80 g

- 1 apple, banana, pear, orange or similar sized fruit,
- ½ grapefruit, 1 slice of large fruit (melon, pineapple)
- 2 plums
- a handful of grapes, cherries, berries
- 3 heaped tablespoons fruit salad (fresh, tinned, stewed)

##### Dried fruit = 25 g

- 1 heaped tablespoon raisins, figs, apricots

##### Vegetables = 80 g

- 3 heaped tablespoons raw, cooked, frozen or tinned vegetables
- a dessert bowl of salad

#### Resistant starches

- These are the starches in foods that are not completely digested by the body. They enter the bowel where they ferment and produce gas. Try reducing your intake of the following foods:
- pulses, whole grains, sweetcorn, green bananas and muesli that contains bran
- undercooked or reheated potato or maize/corn – instead eat them freshly cooked and still hot
- oven chips, crisps, potato waffles, fried rice – choose baked potatoes or boiled rice
- part-baked and reheated breads, such as garlic bread, pizza base – choose fresh breads
- processed food such as potato or pasta salad, or manufactured biscuits and cakes
- ready meals containing pasta or potato, such as lasagne, shepherd's pie, macaroni cheese
- dried pasta – use fresh pasta instead.