



## 7 Lifestyle Changes to Help You Cope With IBS

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### Handy Tips for Living With IBS

Because the medical community has not yet identified a specific cause of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), it can feel frustrating to experience IBS symptoms and not know why you have the condition.

Fortunately, there are many lifestyle changes that you can make to help you manage your symptoms and live a more comfortable life.

#### **Track What You Eat and How It Makes You Feel**

Many people with IBS have symptoms that are triggered by specific foods, like dairy, gluten, and dietary fiber. If you think that certain types of food might be making your IBS symptoms worse, start tracking what you eat using an IBS food and symptom diary.

When you experience IBS symptoms like gas, bloating, nausea, constipation, or diarrhea, write these down in your food log as well, along with the time of day that they happen. You can also track how much sleep you get, whether or not you wake up during the night, energy levels, mood, and exercise.

The information you track in your food log could help you make associations between certain foods and your IBS symptoms.

#### **Visit a Nutritionist for Help Creating a Personalized Diet**

A licensed nutritionist may be able to work with you to develop a personalized diet to help you manage your IBS symptoms.

If you visit a nutritionist, make sure you take your food log with you. This will help them see connections between what you eat and how you feel. Providing your nutritionist with this information may even speed up the process of creating a diet that works for you.

#### **Change the Size and Frequency of Your Meals, Depending on Your Symptoms**

If you tend to have either diarrhea or constipation, changing how much and how often you eat throughout the day could be helpful for you.

For people who often have diarrhea, eating several small meals throughout the day rather than the more traditional three large ones may improve your symptoms.

If you're experiencing constipation, some have found relief by increasing the amount of fiber-rich foods they eat, while sticking to three meals a day.

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One thing to be aware of is that dietary fiber can cause gas and bloating for some people with IBS. Gradually increasing your dietary fiber intake over several weeks may lessen its impact on gas and bloating.

### **Decrease Stress**

Stress can make IBS symptoms worse, so it is important to manage it. The bowel is connected to the nervous system, and when the nervous system registers stress, the bowel experiences it too.

Some experts believe that people with IBS have a bowel that is more sensitive to both stress and problem foods. So both everyday stressors, like work and family, and bigger life events, like the death of a loved one, may affect people with IBS more.

Some stress management options are meditation, mindfulness practices, and exercise. You can also work with your health care providers to create a stress management plan that works for you.

### **Stay Hydrated**

Water aids digestive processes, so it is important to drink plenty of it throughout the day.

However, alcohol, caffeine, and carbonated beverages can worsen IBS symptoms like diarrhea. If this is an issue for you, you might want to skip the cocktails and coffee and stick to water instead.

### **Get Plenty of Sleep**

Poor quality sleep or lack of sleep can negatively impact your IBS symptoms the next day. Unfortunately, abdominal pain or other discomforts associated with IBS can also interrupt sleep. This creates a vicious cycle for people who have IBS.

However, there are many ways to improve sleep, even when experiencing the symptoms of IBS. First, keep a consistent bedtime and waking time to help your body build a sleep routine.

Next, use your bed only for sleep and not for activities such as reading or watching television. This will help you associate your bed only with sleep.

You can also spend time relaxing in another room before you go to bed to create a break between the stresses of the day and trying to fall asleep.

Finally, research has shown that people who have both IBS and depression experience more disturbances to their sleep. If you think that you are experiencing depression, seeking solutions like counseling could help improve both your sleep and overall wellbeing.

### **Exercise Regularly**

Exercising helps the digestive system function smoothly. Consider how much you currently exercise and whether you should increase the amount or intensity of activity you do.

If you don't exercise regularly, finding a workout routine that you find enjoyable and easy to build into your schedule will help you exercise more consistently. Even building walk breaks into your workday will be helpful if you spend most of your time sitting.

Some of these lifestyle changes are big, and some of them are minimal. Like many IBS solutions, what works for one person may not work for another.

You might need to test these lifestyle changes out to see which ones work best for you. And you may want to

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work with a doctor or nutritionist to determine what diet and lifestyle choices will help you live your healthiest, most comfortable life with IBS.