What Not to Eat: 14 Foods to Avoid With IBS

by EMMI SCOTT

14 Foods to Avoid With IBS – Dealing With IBS Food Sensitivities

There is no set diet that all IBS patients can follow, but there are some foods that crop up again and again when you ask IBS sufferers what makes them ill.

One survey of IBS sufferers found that the most commonly avoided foods were wheat, milk, fructose, caffeine, certain meats, fatty foods, alcohol, spices, dairy products, and grains.

Some of these foods naturally set off contractions within the intestines that can lead to diarrhea in sensitive people, while others contain ingredients such as sugars or stimulants that can lead to fermentation in the gut and therefore gas and bloating. It makes sense for any sufferer to try avoiding some of these most common culprits.

That said, it's important to realize that IBS varies from person to person and what might make me ill could have no effect on you whatsoever. You will need to try out some of these suggestions on your symptoms to see what works for you and what doesn't.

It's also important that you end up with a diet that is still healthy and meeting all your nutritional needs, so please don't cut out every item on this list! A trial and error approach (like an IBS elimination diet) where you avoid a particular food for a few weeks should be enough to see whether long-term avoidance is a good idea.

Soluble or Insoluble Fiber

Fiber is found in both soluble and insoluble forms. Each can relieve or aggravate IBS symptoms, so it's important to know about both and in which foods they are found.

Soluble Fiber

Soluble fiber helps with diarrhea because it removes excess water from the digestive tract. This slows down the passage of waste through the bowel.

Soluble fiber is found in carrots, mangos, grapefruit, oranges, berries, and psyllium husks.

While soluble fiber is helpful for diarrhea, it can worsen constipation. To combat constipation, you should increase your intake of insoluble fiber.

Insoluble Fiber

Insoluble fiber brings more water into the digestive tract, rather than removing it, like soluble fiber. This aids in relieving constipation but would make diarrhea worse.

If you want to add more insoluble fiber to your diet, you should eat grapes, cabbage, broccoli, and zucchini. Insoluble fiber is also found in whole grains, bran, rolled oats, and brown rice.

Fat and Grease

High fat, greasy foods such as burgers and red meat can cause significant problems. This is because fat is a stimulant to the digestive tract, causing the contractions in the gut to intensify and in turn leading to diarrhea.

This is particularly true for foods containing high levels of saturated fats. Look out for any of these nasties:

- Anything that is fried in oil or batter
- Red meat, including anything made from minced or ground beef, steak, bacon, sausages, and salami
- Darker meats from chicken and turkey
- Egg yolks
- Dairy products including milk, butter, cream, cheese, and ice cream (dairy products can also be a problem if you are sensitive to lactose)
- French fries
- Spreads and oils, including margarine and olive oil (I'm afraid virgin or extra virgin olive oil contain just as much fat as the regular kind)
- Doughnuts, cookies, and cakes

Dairy

Dairy can be a double-edged sword because as well as their high-fat content, dairy foods also contain lactose. Lactose is a sugar present in milk and relies on the enzyme lactase for proper digestion.

If not enough lactase is produced then unabsorbed lactose can pass into the gut where it is fermented by bacteria, in turn producing gas and symptoms such as bloating and diarrhea.

Many people who have IBS are lactose intolerant. This means that they can't fully digest the sugars in milk, called lactose.

Lactose intolerance is a disorder in its own right, separate from IBS, which can be diagnosed through a breath test or blood test.

Fortunately, many IBS sufferers find that they too benefit from at least limiting dairy foods or trying the lactose-free or lower fat versions. There are more dairy alternatives available, such as soy, rice, or nut milks. Also, many people with lactose intolerance can successfully digest yogurt.

Even if you are not lactose intolerant, the fat in dairy can cause diarrhea. You may consider consuming low-fat or non-fat dairy products to avoid this.

Grains

If you suspect that some grains don't agree with you try avoiding anything containing wheat and gluten; corn and rice may be easier for you to tolerate.

You can also experiment with different types of bread, as a high fiber, seeded loaf may be better for those with constipation and a low fiber white loaf for those with diarrhea.

Fructose

I hate to say that even a piece of fruit can make you ill, but for some IBS sufferers, it's true. This may be due to the high fructose content of some fruits – fructose is a sugar that can be difficult for some people to absorb.

You may be better off with fruits that are low in FODMAPs and so cause less fermentation, so you could try avoiding some of these:

- apples and pears
- nectarines and peaches
- grapefruit
- apricots
- blackberries
- cherries
- Watermelon

Caffeine

The caffeine in tea, coffee, and cola doesn't just stimulate your brain to wake up in the morning; it also stimulates your intestines, so too much caffeine can lead to diarrhea.

Be aware that chocolate also contains caffeine because of the cocoa content. Energy drinks are another significant source of caffeine that is probably best left on the shelf.

Caffeine stimulates the digestive system, which often leads to diarrhea for people with IBS. Because of this, you may want to avoid coffee and caffeinated soda, tea, and energy drinks.

Alcohol

Too much alcohol results in an upset stomach because alcohol is an irritant which our stomachs just don't like. Drink too much, and your stomach will produce far more acid than usual, and this acid will lead to diarrhea, colon spasms, bloating and constipation.

Some people can tolerate drinking alcohol with IBS occasionally if they are careful about how they drink.

It may be helpful to avoid red wine and beer, as these beverages tend to aggravate IBS symptoms. You can also make sure to drink a glass of water for every alcoholic beverage you consume.

However, if you find yourself experiencing heightened IBS symptoms every time you drink alcohol, you may want to cut it out altogether.

Next page: What other foods to avoid with IBS are there? Onions, garlic, fried and processed foods, and five more foods to avoid.

5 More Foods to Avoid With IBS

Onions and Garlic

Onions can be a major trigger for IBSers. This may be because they are a type of "oligosaccharide," the carbohydrate that puts the 'O' in FODMAP.

As onions are a short chain carb they may ferment at a quicker rate in the gut – and fermenting is not what you want! Leeks and shallots may also have a similar effect; in fact, you may find that any vegetable that is a member of the 'allium' family gives you symptoms, so that also includes chives and garlic.

Fried and Processed Food

Foods that are high in fat can irritate the digestive system by increasing intestinal contractions. Because of this, people with IBS should avoid fatty foods, such as fried or processed foods.

However, healthy fats, such as those found in fish and avocados, support digestive processes and general health.

It is easier to avoid eating overly fatty foods when consuming freshly-made meals instead of processed ones. This can also help you avoid other additives that might trigger your IBS symptoms.

Spicy Foods

A bit of an obvious one, this, as we all know that a spicy, hot curry can cause problems.

What you may not know is that there is evidence to suggest that IBS patients have an unusually high number of nerve fibers that react to substances like chili that contain capsaicin, the substance that causes pain, so it's no wonder we can't cope with hot foods.

Avoid chili, peppers, anything with cayenne powder or paprika, horseradish, mustard, cloves, and nutmeg.

Beans and Legumes

The carbohydrates in beans and legumes are not easily digestible. This leads to gas, which can often be painful for individuals with IBS. They can also cause bloating and cramps.

Most people know that beans can cause gas, but any legume or cabbage may have a similar effect, including broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. Wheatgerm, raisins, and celery may also cause increased gas. Within the legume family, lentils and chickpeas may be safer to eat.

Artificial Sweeteners

Steer clear of any food that contains artificial sweeteners such as sorbitol and xylitol. If you read the label of a pack of sugar-free gum that contains sorbitol, you'll often see a warning that over-consumption can cause diarrhea – and that's in *healthy* people!

This is because the sorbitol (a type of sugar alcohol) is poorly digested, not well absorbed into the body and so stays in the gut attracting water. This means it works just like an 'osmotic' laxative such as milk of magnesia, giving you diarrhea.

Other sweetener names to look out for are aspartame and sucralose; be wary of any gum, candies, biscuits and even toothpaste that is labeled 'sugar-free' or 'no added sugar' – they may have added something far worse than sugar.

Carbonated Beverages

Fizzy drinks such as Coca-Cola are pumped full of carbon dioxide, one of the gases which make up flatulence, so needless to say it's not a great idea to consume them if you've got gut problems.

Many sodas are also sweetened with high fructose corn syrup rather than regular sugar, and this can lead to cramps and spasms, with the sugar-free versions just as bad because of artificial sweeteners. Add in caffeine as well in many cases, and you get a recipe for disaster that is best avoided altogether.

Large Meals

One final point to make is that it's no good conscientiously avoiding all of your IBS triggers if you then shovel a whole day's worth of food into your poor stomach in one sitting.

The more food you eat in one go, the more likely you are to set off the gastrocolic reflex that naturally tells your body that it's time to visit the bathroom. Small but regular meals are far kinder to an IBS bowel.

Consulting a Professional

Each person’s body will respond differently to dietary choices. You may be able to tolerate some of these foods but not others.

It may be helpful to consult with a doctor or nutritionist when choosing which foods you will cut out and which you will continue eating.

While it is important to eliminate irritants to your digestive system, you still want to make sure that you’re getting enough nutrients.

One way to prepare for a visit to your doctor or nutritionist is to track what you eat and your IBS symptoms using a food log over a period of a few weeks. Take your food log to your visit to give your doctor or nutritionist more information about your digestive issues.