6 Diet Tips for People With IBS

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Best Foods for IBS

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a gastrointestinal disorder affecting between 25 to 45 million Americans. The cause of IBS is unknown and there is no cure, but symptoms can be managed. One way to manage IBS symptoms is by making healthy diet choices. So, what are the best foods for IBS and what should you avoid? Let's find out.

IBS and the Link to Diet

You may notice that your IBS symptoms get worse after a meal. Researchers believe stomach muscles and nerves are over-responsive in IBS patients and this may cause your bowel to overact after eating.

There is no direct evidence that certain foods affect some people differently, and diet is not the cause of IBS, but research shows that at least 50% of IBS sufferers report worsening IBS symptoms after eating and as much as 54% find relief when they avoid and limit certain foods from their diet.

Therefore, it is possible that avoiding certain foods may help you to manage IBS symptoms.

Modifying Your Diet to Manage IBS

A healthy diet alone may not improve IBS, so you will need to be more specific when it comes to modifying your diet. Eliminating certain drinks and foods is a start.

Here are some diet changes that may help you manage symptoms:

1. Reduce the Intake of Certain Drinks

Caffeine is a stimulant and gets the colon moving, which may promote and worsen pain and diarrhea symptoms. Limit your caffeine, especially coffee, to no more than two cups per day.

Except for water, there are no healthy or safe ingredients in soda. Most are sweetened with fructose (fruit sugar), and fructose has been linked to abdominal distress, including cramping, bloating, spasms and diarrhea — and not just in people with IBS.

Even diet sodas are bad options because they contain artificial sweeteners, which are known for causing gastrointestinal troubles. Sodas may contain caffeine and are also carbonated, which means more gas, bloating and other intestinal symptoms.

Alcohol in moderation may not trigger your IBS symptoms, but heavy drinking might. A 2013 study found when women with IBS drink more than four alcoholic drinks daily, they are more likely to experience nausea, stomach

pain and indigestion, compared to their counterparts who don't have IBS. Limit your alcohol intake to no more than one glass per day and aim to have at least two to three alcohol-free days per week.

If possible, axe the caffeine, sodas and alcohol altogether and consider healthier options:
Fruit juices without corn syrup.

- Vegetable juices.
- Decaffeinated coffees and teas.
- Herbal teas.
- Ginger drinks.
- Dairy-free milk (rice, soy, almond or lactose-free).

Drink at least 8 to 10 cups of water a day. Drinking plenty of water will help you replace lost fluids from diarrhea symptoms and also improve constipation.

2. Minimize Resistant Starch

There are some starches your gut will struggle to digest. This is because they reach the gut intact and are provoked by gut bacteria, causing gas, bloating and diarrhea.

Some foods that are resistant starches — bananas, beans, lentils, potatoes and whole grains — are actually ones we generally consider as part of a healthy diet. You can still eat them, but reducing them may help improve your IBS symptoms.

You should also stay away from foods containing resistant starches. These include processed foods (chips and cereals), precooked foods (pasta and potatoes), partially baked breads (frozen garlic bread), pastries and dried pastas.

3. Consider Your Fiber Intake

For some people, reducing high-fiber foods can help improve IBS symptoms, but that is not the case for everyone.

You may want to adjust fiber intake based on your symptoms. Keeping a food and symptom diary can help you to determine which fiber-rich foods worsen symptoms.

Generally, reducing insoluble fibers helps people manage their symptoms. These fibers are not dissolvable in water, do not easily break down and cannot pass through the digestive track intact. Examples of insoluble fiber foods are wheat and bran, corn, nuts and whole grains.

Soluble fibers are a better option. These fibers are dissolvable in water and broken down easily by natural bacteria in the bowel.

Soluble rich fiber foods soften stools and make them larger, so consuming this type of fiber many minimize symptoms of constipation. Soluble rich fiber foods include oats, barley, fruits and vegetables and beans.

4. Reduce Fructose

Fructose, in large amounts, has been linked to loose stools, diarrhea and worsening IBS symptoms. It is possible that up to 64% of people with IBS struggle with the inability to absorb fructose.

Limit your intake of fructose by limiting fruit intake to no more than three portions per day and do not consume more than eight ounces of juice per day. Substitute reduced fruit intake with more vegetables.

Limit honey and foods containing high fructose corn syrup, which includes processed and junk foods. Check food

labels to find this information.

5. Say No to Sorbitol

Sorbitol and other artificial sweeteners are poorly absorbed by the body and have laxative effects once they hit colon. You may be sensitive to even small amounts of sorbitol.

Sorbitol is found in sugar-free gums, candies, sodas and diet products. Check food labels to help you avoid sorbitol and other artificial sweeteners.

6. Get More Probiotics

Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts that benefit your digestive system. It is possible that consuming more probiotics for IBS may help improve your symptoms. Probiotic foods include yogurts, dark chocolate, cultured vegetables (i.e. sauerkraut), broccoli and other cruciferous vegetables (kale, cabbage and cauliflower), blueberries and beans.

There have been numerous studies showing that probiotics are effective in alleviating IBS symptoms, such as abdominal pain, bloating and discomfort.

In fact, a 2010 study showed that 80% of IBS patients given probiotics were showing improvements in abdominal discomfort and bloating.

Probiotic foods and supplements are generally safe, but it is important to talk to your doctor to make sure you can include them in your diet.

Consider Your Intolerances

If after making these diet changes your symptoms do not improve, you find some benefit in finding out which foods are aggravating your symptoms.

Try keeping a food and symptom dairy to figure out what specific food intolerances you may have. Common food intolerances may include dairy products and wheat products.

You may also want to talk your doctor about testing for specific food intolerances, including dairy.