



Coping With IBS Symptoms

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Easing the emotional burden of IBS

Anyone with IBS knows that one small pain can lead to a lot of embarrassment, and that humiliation can quickly overtake your confidence and motivation. Unfortunately for most sufferers, there's no reliable treatment for their IBS, which means that awkward or uncomfortable situations are bound to pop up, but they don't have to ruin your day. A few measures will help you relax, prepare, and plan for damage control, to help you take your IBS symptoms in stride.

Easing IBS Symptoms and Consequences

Since IBS symptoms are brought on or made worse by stress, do what you can to ease some anxiety at the outset. Good preparation is one of the best ways to calm your fears, so learn about your IBS triggers, scout out the toilet facilities, and have an action plan to recover from symptoms. Knowledge offers a sense of control, which will help you stay calm and diminish your chances of letting an embarrassing IBS episode derail your day:

- **Know your enemy.** Get a really good idea of the foods that work for you, and those that don't. Keep logs of your daily menus (and your body's reactions), noting which ingredients seem to spark the most discomfort (wheat and dairy are two of the most common triggers). When you're out, be extremely careful to avoid all of those ingredients – stick to simple dishes that you know well, and don't be afraid to ask lots of questions of the server or cook.
- **Prepare for the worst.** Unpleasant surprises are a part of life with IBS diarrhea, and since you probably can't avoid them altogether, make sure you have the tools to deal with them swiftly, easily and completely. Pack an emergency clean-up kit to take around with you, including things like wet wipes, spare underpants and small plastic bags for discreet disposal after an accident. Of course, you hope you will never need to use them, but having these supplies close by can be reassuring.
- **Stay hydrated.** Both constipation and diarrhea call for water, and sipping on pure, fresh water throughout the day can bring a psychological benefit, too. A twinge or squeak in your gut can spark panic, leading to a dry mouth and further stomach upset. Some people find that the physical act of drinking water can alleviate some of that panic, plus it will provide a bit of relief from the discomfort, and a short but happy distraction from the symptoms.

Find Support in Your Peers

IBS is a surprisingly common affliction, and though it's not talked about in public, many people are happy to share their thoughts about their illness with other sufferers. Simply talking about your concerns, hardships or embarrassments can relieve a lot of stress, and put your embarrassment in context. If a face-to-face support group isn't for you, there are plenty of online forums to visit at your leisure.

See your IBS for what it is -- a disease, not a weakness that you've brought upon yourself. This admission may not relieve all of the emotional turmoil that comes with embarrassing episodes, but don't be too afraid to talk to

your friends, coworkers and family about your condition, stressing that the physical symptoms are outside your control, and it's something you have to live with the best you can.