Keeping Track of Your Weight with IBS

by EMMI SCOTT

IBS Weight Gain

Developing irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) can result in many unexpected changes. Your body will feel different, you might modify your diet, and you will likely make some lifestyle changes to deal with your symptoms. Weight gain is another possible change you can experience with IBS.

While many people might be worried about the thought of IBS weight gain, with the right information and mindset, you can continue to lead a healthy lifestyle.

People with IBS are actually more likely to experience weight loss because of dietary changes, inefficient nutrition absorption, and urgent bowel movements after eating. And many IBS patients have discomfort after eating, which might lead them to eat smaller meals or to skip a meal altogether.

Nutritional Imbalance

However, some people with IBS do notice weight gain. One reason for IBS weight gain is a nutritional imbalance. To soothe IBS symptoms, people with the condition will often change their diet. Because various foods trigger IBS symptoms, they have fewer options than people with a healthy digestive system. This can lead to a nutritional imbalance and overeating.

Since many fruits and vegetables can cause IBS symptoms, preparing healthy meals can be more difficult. People with IBS might eat more starchy foods, like potatoes and rice, in order to feel full while not agitating their digestive system. The foods they find that feel comfortable to eat might be more calorie dense than their previous diet, which can also result in weight gain.

Decreased Physical Activity

When you have IBS, there are many days when you don’t feel well. You might experience nausea, diarrhea, stomach aches, or other symptoms. This can lead people to be less active than they were before developing IBS, leading to weight gain.

Additionally, certain exercises can aggravate the digestive system. Any exercises that involve running or jumping can cause pain or discomfort for people with IBS. If you’re used to getting your exercise through running or high-intensity interval training, maintaining a healthy weight can become a challenge.

IBS Bloating

Bloating is a common IBS symptom. While it can feel and even look like weight gain, there are clear differences between weight gain and bloating.

While weight gain is obvious all over the body, bloating is centered on the stomach. Bloating usually last for just one to five days before receding, while weight gain persists. Bloating can be felt as abdominal pressure and frequently gets worse after meals. To avoid bloating, eat slowly, take digestive enzymes right before eating, and avoid foods high in salt and sugar.

Maintaining a Healthy Weight

While weight gain from IBS may feel insurmountable because you feel unwell much of the time, there is hope. Specific lifestyle changes can help you healthily lose weight and maintain a healthy weight without irritating your digestive system.

Talk to Your Doctor

When you have a condition like IBS, it's important to communicate with your doctor any time you make a major change.

If you've noticed weight gain since your IBS diagnosis, check in with your gastroenterologist. They can run tests to find out what is causing your weight gain, or they may have other insights as to what is causing it.

Find Alternative Exercises

When you think of weight loss, you might imagine engaging in an exercise routine involving running or high-intensity interval training. Although those exercises will aggravate IBS symptoms, there are other options to stay active with IBS.

Try walking or swimming to get in some cardiovascular exercises. Gentle yoga or Pilates classes can help you tone your muscles, stretch, and build strength without hurting your digestive system.

Weightlifting is one of the best ways to increase your metabolism, leading to weight loss. Try lifting lower weights for more repetitions rather than agitating your digestive tract by lifting higher weights.

Track Your Eating Habits

Writing down what you eat and how your body responds can provide you with a lot of information. You might notice trends in IBS symptoms or discover a nutritional imbalance.

Many people with IBS choose to work with a nutritionist to ensure that they're getting adequate nourishment while avoiding IBS symptoms. Taking the information from a food journal or app to your nutritionist can be helpful to them in building a healthy diet for you.

Healthy IBS Diet

The best way to avoid weight gain is to maintain a healthy diet. Many people with IBS find that a low FODMAP diet helps them stay healthy and avoid weight gain and IBS symptoms.

FODMAP stands for fermentable oligo-, di-, mono-saccharides and polyols. There are sugars in these foods that are difficult for people with IBS to digest. They often worsen their symptoms.

To follow a low FODMAP diet, focus on consuming:

- Lean proteins like chicken, eggs, turkey, and fish
- Fruits such as bananas, blueberries, oranges, pineapples, grapes, and strawberries
- Vegetables such as carrots, green beans, kale, lettuce, squash, cucumbers, and tomatoes
- Lactose-free dairy products

- Natural sweeteners like brown sugar, maple syrup, and cane sugar

Many of the foods that worsen IBS symptoms also often lead to weight gain. For these reasons, it’s doubly important to avoid these foods:

- Fried foods
- High-fat foods
- Whole milk products
- Alcoholic beverages
- Caffeinated beverages
- Artificial sweeteners
- Foods that cause gas like beans and cabbage

While weight gain can feel like another source of discouragement when dealing with IBS, it doesn’t have to last forever. There are many resources and gradual lifestyle changes that you can use to return to and maintain a healthy weight.