

# Nutrition Guidelines for Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

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# Nutrition Guidelines for IBS

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a change in how food and digestive juices move through the bowels. This can be:

- › Too fast, causing diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
- › Too slow, causing constipation (not able to poop)
- › Both too fast and too slow

## Symptoms of IBS include:

- › Abdominal (stomach area) pain and cramping
- › Abdominal bloating
- › Mucus in your stool (poop)
- › A lot of gas
- › Abdominal noises
- › Pain that usually gets better after a bowel movement (poop)
- › Feeling like you still need to have a bowel movement after having one

**IBS is different for everyone.** Some people may have all of the symptoms listed above, while others may only have a few. The good news is that IBS does not raise your risk for developing major illness and does not affect life expectancy (how long you will live). IBS symptoms can be managed and lowered.

## How is IBS treated?

- There is no cure for IBS, but you can manage your symptoms.
- There is no one best way to treat IBS. There are many treatments to help manage IBS symptoms. Not all treatments will work the same for all people with IBS. Treatment plans are adjusted for each person.
- You can help manage your symptoms by:
  - › looking at how and what you eat.
  - › being more active.
  - › getting enough sleep.
  - › stopping smoking.

## Look at how you eat

- Start your day with breakfast.
- Eat meals at regular times. Space meals apart every 4 to 6 hours during the day.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Eat smaller amounts.
- **Do not** eat a large amount before going to bed.
- Chew with your mouth closed to keep air from entering. The air may cause gas.
- **Do not** use a straw when drinking.
- Sip drinks slowly.

## Look at what you eat

Try to:

- Eat more fibre.
- Drink more fluids especially water, non-caffeinated and non-alcoholic drinks.
- Drink less caffeine (like coffee, tea, dark pop).
- Avoid fatty foods (like fried foods).
- Avoid foods that cause gas.
- Avoid spicy foods.
- Avoid foods that may cause heartburn (a burning feeling in your chest after eating).
- Limit milk and milk products if you are lactose intolerant (your body is not able to process the sugar in milk).
- Avoid sweeteners (like fructose, sorbitol, mannitol).
- Avoid carbonated (fizzy) drinks.
- **Do not** chew gum or suck on hard candies.
- Avoid alcohol.

## Eat more fibre

- Fibre is a carbohydrate. It is found naturally in plant foods, and passes through the body undigested.
- Fibre has many health benefits. It:
  - › May help stop bowel diseases
  - › May lower the risk of cardiovascular (heart) disease
  - › Helps to lower bad (LDL) cholesterol
  - › Helps to control blood sugars
  - › Can make you feel full longer
  - › Helps food move through the bowel, which lessens bowel spasms. This results in less IBS symptoms.

### **Fibre is found in complex carbohydrates, such as:**

- › Vegetables and fruits
- › Legumes (beans, pulses, etc.)
- › Whole wheat and whole grain products

If you are wheat intolerant, try other whole grains, such as:

- › Brown rice
- › Quinoa
- › Brown rice pasta
- › Breads, flours, or grains from quinoa, millet, buckwheat, oats, rice, amaranth, arrowroot, corn, or other gluten-free flours

**Note: Corn flour is OK, but whole corn kernels may not be.** They may cause pain.

### **There are 2 types of fibre:**

**Soluble:** dissolves (disappears) or swells (becomes gel-like) when placed in water

Soluble fibre can help:

- › diarrhea by making stool thicker.
- › constipation by making stool softer.
- › control blood sugars.
- › lower LDL cholesterol.

Sources of soluble fibre include:

- › Whole oats
- › Oat bran
- › Rice bran
- › Pulses (dried beans, split peas, chickpeas, lentils), dried or canned
- › Psyllium
- › Ground flax seeds
- › Some fruits and vegetables, such as apples, strawberries, sweet potatoes, and carrots

**Insoluble:** does not dissolve in water

Insoluble fibre can help:

- › constipation by keeping things moving through the digestive system.
- › regularity by adding bulk to stool (making it thicker).

Sources of insoluble fibre include:

- › Wheat bran
- › Whole grain products
- › Corn bran
- › Some fruits and vegetables (especially the skins, leaves, and seeds)

## Fibre recommendations

Total fibre (grams (g) per day)

| Age      | Female | Male |
|----------|--------|------|
| 19 to 30 | 25     | 38   |
| 31 to 50 | 25     | 38   |
| 51 to 70 | 21     | 30   |
| Over 70  | 21     | 30   |

## How to get more fibre

- Look for packages labelled “whole grains”.
- Use whole wheat or whole grain flour.
- Choose bread with 2 g of fibre or more per slice.
- Choose grains with 2 g or more fibre per serving.
- Add high fibre cereals to other foods (like cookies, muffins, loaves, coatings for chicken or fish, or yogurt toppings).
- Add fruit to yogurt, puddings, cottage cheese, or frozen yogurt.
- Add dried fruit to baked goods, cereal, or yogurt.
- Choose fruit for snacks.
- Add more vegetables to casseroles and soups.

### **Note: Add more fibre slowly over time.**

- **It is best to get your fibre from food.** When you do, it usually means you are eating a healthier diet. This can lower your risk for other diseases, like cancer and heart disease.
- The following examples show how to slowly get more fibre to help with IBS symptoms. **Do not do all examples at once.**

**Note:** It may take 2 to 4 weeks to see a difference. Be patient and remember to drink enough fluids.

**Try only one example at a time, based on your symptoms.**

### **Example 1: For constipation and/or diarrhea, bloating, and abdominal pain**

Kellogg's® All-Bran® Bran Buds® with psyllium fibre (includes both soluble and insoluble fibre)

1. Start with 2 tbsp a day for 1 to 2 weeks (4 g fibre).
2. Increase to 1/4 cup a day for 1 to 2 weeks (8 g fibre).
3. If you still have symptoms, increase to 1/3 cup a day (11 g fibre). **Do not take more than this amount.**

## **Example 2: For constipation, bloating, and abdominal pain**

Natural bran

1. Start with 2 tbsp a day for 1 to 2 weeks (3 g fibre).
2. Increase to 4 tbsp a day for 1 to 2 weeks (6.5 g fibre).
3. Then increase to 6 tbsp a day (10 g fibre), if needed.

## **Example 3: For constipation, bloating, and abdominal pain**

Kellogg's® All-Bran® Original cereal

1. Start with 2 tbsp a day for 1 to 2 weeks (3 g fibre).
2. Increase to 1/4 cup a day for 1 to 2 weeks (6 g fibre).
3. Then increase to 1/2 cup a day (12 g fibre).

## **Example 4: For diarrhea and constipation, or diarrhea with or without abdominal pain**

Psyllium seed husks

1. Start with 2 tsp a day for 1 to 2 weeks (4 g fibre).
2. Increase to 4 tsp a day for 1 to 2 weeks (8 g fibre).
3. If you do not get better or worse, increase to 5 to 6 tsp (about 2 tbsp) a day (10 to 12 g fibre).

## **Fibre supplements**

If you cannot get your fibre from food, you can take a fibre supplement.

**Note: Take only one supplement at a time.** If one does not help, stop and try a different one.

### **Examples:**

- Metamucil®: made with psyllium
- Normacol®: made from a vegetable gum called sterculia
- Prodiem®: made from a vegetable gum
- Citrucel®: made with methylcellulose

**Follow all package directions.**



## Guidelines for taking Metamucil®:

### Metamucil® Sugar-Free:

- › Start with 1 tsp each day for 1 week (7 days).
- › Then add 1 tsp **at a different time of the day** each day for 1 week (for a total of 2 tsp a day).
- › You may need to add 1 more tsp a day (for a total of 3 tsp a day).
- › **Do not take more than 4 tsp a day.**

### Metamucil® with sugar:

- › Start with 1 tbsp each day for 1 week (7 days).
- › Then add 1 tbsp **at a different time of the day** each day for 1 week (for a total of 2 tbsp a day).
- › You may need to add 1 more tbsp a day (for a total of 3 tbsp a day).
- › **Do not take more than 4 tbsp a day.**

**Before adding psyllium seed husks to foods or starting a fibre supplement, check with a pharmacist to see if it will affect your medication(s).**

## Drink more fluids

- Fibre does not work without enough fluids.
- You need 8 to 10 cups of fluids a day.
- At least half of your fluid intake should be from drinking water.
- Include all non-alcoholic drinks when adding up your fluid intake.
- Limit caffeinated drinks. If caffeine does not bother you, you can count up to 2 to 3 cups of caffeinated drinks as part of your daily fluids.

## Drink less caffeine

- Caffeine may cause heart palpitations (fast or irregular heartbeat), anxiety, insomnia (not being able to sleep), heartburn, diarrhea, stomach pain, or gas.
- Health Canada recommends having no more than 400 mg of caffeine a day. This is the same as 3 cups (750 ml total, 8 oz/250 ml each) of coffee a day. People with IBS may not be able to tolerate this much. If caffeine bothers you, try drinking herbal tea, Postum<sup>®</sup>, Ovaltine<sup>®</sup>, or decaffeinated tea or coffee.

## Amount of caffeine in some common drinks

| Amount                                    | Caffeine content (mg)       |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1 cup (250 ml) brewed coffee              | 135 mg                      |
| 1 cup roasted, ground, filter drip coffee | 179 mg                      |
| 1 cup regular tea                         | 43 mg                       |
| 1 cup green tea                           | 30 mg                       |
| 1 can (355 ml) cola                       | 36 to 50 mg                 |
| Energy drink                              | Can range from 50 to 350 mg |

**Avoid energy drinks.** They can be high in caffeine, and have other ingredients that may be harmful.

## Is fat a trigger for your symptoms?

Fat is hard to digest. Eating less fat may help to lower some of your IBS symptoms (like cramping, pain, and diarrhea).

## How to eat less fat

- Try to choose foods lower in fat. Check nutrition labels for the % daily value (DV). A DV of 15% or more is high. A DV of 5% or less is low.
- Limit fat to small amounts at a time.
- Choose lean cuts of meat and cut off visible fat before cooking.
- Choose low fat milk products, like skim or 1% M.F. (milk fat).
- Use heart healthy cooking methods: grill, BBQ, broil, boil, or microwave.
- Watch for hidden fat. Read nutrition labels on muffins, baked goods, and crackers.

- Skim fat off the top of homemade soups and stews.
- Avoid deep-fried foods, processed meats (deli meats), rich desserts, gravies, high fat cream-based sauces, high fat snack foods (like nachos, potato chips), chocolate, convenience foods, and fast foods.

### **Avoid foods that cause gas**

- Foods that cause gas can make symptoms of bloating and gas worse.

**\*Avoid eating all raw vegetables.\***

| <b>Best choices</b>   | <b>Foods to avoid</b>  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Vegetables (cooked)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asparagus</li> <li>• Beets</li> <li>• Carrots</li> <li>• Green beans</li> <li>• Mushrooms</li> <li>• Peas</li> <li>• Potatoes</li> <li>• Pumpkin</li> <li>• Spinach</li> <li>• Squash</li> <li>• Sweet potatoes</li> <li>• Yellow beans</li> <li>• Zucchini</li> </ul> | <p><b>(including cooked vegetables)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broccoli</li> <li>• Brussels sprouts</li> <li>• Cabbage</li> <li>• Cauliflower</li> <li>• Corn</li> <li>• Cucumbers</li> <li>• Kohlrabi</li> <li>• Kimchi</li> <li>• Leeks</li> <li>• Onions</li> <li>• Peppers</li> <li>• Pimentos</li> <li>• Radishes</li> <li>• Rutabagas</li> <li>• Sauerkraut</li> <li>• Scallions</li> <li>• Shallots</li> <li>• Turnips</li> </ul> |

| Best choices   | Foods to avoid  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Fruit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apples (peeled)</li> <li>• Applesauce (unsweetened)</li> <li>• Bananas (soft, ripe)</li> <li>• Berries</li> <li>• Canned fruit</li> <li>• Grapefruit</li> <li>• Kiwis</li> <li>• Nectarines</li> <li>• Oranges</li> <li>• Peaches</li> <li>• Pears</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apple (unpeeled)</li> <li>• Avocados</li> <li>• Cantaloupes</li> <li>• Honeydew melons</li> <li>• Watermelon</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Other</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beer</li> <li>• Eggs (boiled)</li> <li>• Carbonated (fizzy) drinks, like pop</li> <li>• Chewing gum</li> <li>• Coconut</li> <li>• Hard candy</li> <li>• Nuts and seeds</li> <li>• Popcorn</li> <li>• Prune juice</li> <li>• Pulses (like dried beans, split peas, chickpeas, lentils) (fresh, dried, or canned)</li> </ul> |

## **Avoid spicy foods and all foods that may cause heartburn**

Heartburn is more common in people with IBS.

### **Avoid foods known to cause heartburn:**

- Citrus fruits (like oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes)
- Tomatoes in any form, such as whole, sauces, juice, etc.
- Caffeine
- Chocolate
- Peppermint
- Alcohol

### **Avoid foods that may cause heartburn:**

- Fatty foods
- High fat snack foods
- Foods that cause gas
- Spicy foods
  - › Spicy foods may make symptoms of pain, cramping, and diarrhea worse.
  - › Limit or avoid hot peppers, chili powder, garlic, hot sauce, curry, ginger, and spicy BBQ sauce.

## **Limit milk and milk products, if you are lactose intolerant**

- Lactose is a natural sugar found in milk. People who are lactose intolerant may not have enough of the enzyme (lactase) needed to break down lactose. Lactose intolerance is common in people with IBS.
- **You may have these symptoms 15 minutes to 2 hours after eating a milk product:**
  - › Bloating
  - › Gas
  - › Cramping
  - › Diarrhea
- Cheese and yogurt are usually well tolerated. This is because the lactose is already digested during processing or by ingredients like bacterial cultures.

## If you are lactose intolerant

- Avoid eating milk products on an empty stomach. You may be able to eat small amounts with other foods.
- You may wish to try lactase enzyme pills or drops. These medications replace the missing enzyme in your body and help to break down lactose. You can buy them over-the-counter at a drugstore.
- Try these milk products instead:
  - › Low-lactose or lactose-free milk
  - › Enriched or fortified soy, almond, or rice milk

Look for 25 to 30% DV for calcium on nutrition labels.

- You may need calcium and vitamin D supplements if you are not able to eat or drink many milk products or replacements. Talk with a dietitian about this.

## Avoid sweeteners

Avoid or limit sweeteners, as they may cause diarrhea, gas, or bloating.

Nutritive sweeteners seem to cause the most symptoms. These include:

- **Fructose:** honey, high-fructose corn syrup, glucose-fructose
- **Sugar alcohols:** sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, lactitol
  - › These sweeteners can be found in pop, sugar-free candies, gum, some diet pop, some fruit juices and drinks, and medications (including over-the-counter ones).

## How to avoid sweeteners

- Check nutrition labels.
- Dilute (water down) fruit juice.
- **Do not** eat sweeteners on an empty stomach.
- Check for hidden sweeteners in your medication(s).
- Avoid processed foods that include sweeteners.

## Does drinking alcohol make my IBS worse?

- Alcohol is a gastrointestinal (GI) stimulant (increases activity). This can cause diarrhea and cramping.
- Some alcoholic drinks (like beer and sparkling wine) are fizzy and cause gas.
- Alcohol dehydrates you (causes you to lose water by making you pee more).
- Avoid all alcoholic drinks, including:
  - › Wine
  - › Beer
  - › Cider
  - › Mixed drinks
  - › Hard liquor

## What else can I do to help my symptoms?

### FODMAP diet

- A low FODMAP diet may help IBS symptoms.
- FODMAPs are fermentable carbohydrates or sugars. The most common FODMAPs that cause IBS symptoms are:
  - › Fructose
  - › Sorbitol
  - › Mannitol
  - › High-fructose corn syrup (glucose-fructose)
  - › Lactose
- FODMAPs can cause symptoms of IBS, like abdominal pain, bloating, nausea, fullness, loose stools, or diarrhea.
- Try lowering the FODMAPs listed above to see if it helps your symptoms. If it does not help your symptoms, **try the other tips in this guide before lowering other FODMAPs.**
- If you are following this guide and still have symptoms, talk with a dietitian about other FODMAPs that may be giving you IBS symptoms.

## Peppermint

- **Do not use peppermint if you have heartburn.**
- Check with a pharmacist first to make sure it will not react with your medication(s).
- Peppermint tea may help to relax bowel muscles.
- A peppermint oil supplement may help with pain, bloating, gas, and diarrhea.

### Tips:

- Use capsules with about 0.2 ml (180 to 225 mg) of peppermint oil per capsule.
- Take enteric-coated (slow-release) capsules.
- Take 1 to 2 capsules 3 times a day
- Take 15 to 30 minutes before meals.
- Look for an NPN, DIN, or USP number on the package. This means the product comes from a trusted source. Ask a pharmacist if you are not sure.

## Probiotics

- Probiotics are healthy bacteria that may help with symptoms of IBS. They can be found in some brands of yogurt and also as supplements in capsule form.
- **Bifidobacteria** has been shown to help lower IBS symptoms in some people. Align® is a probiotic supplement that helps some people with IBS.
- Check the nutrition label on your yogurt for probiotic bacteria and live bacterial cultures.

### For more information on probiotics:

Alliance for Education on Probiotics

#### Clinical Guide to Probiotic Products Available - 2021 Edition

- › [www.probioticchart.ca/PBCAdultHealth.html?utm\\_source=adult\\_ind&utm\\_medium=civ&utm\\_campaign=CDN\\_CHART](http://www.probioticchart.ca/PBCAdultHealth.html?utm_source=adult_ind&utm_medium=civ&utm_campaign=CDN_CHART)

Look for probiotics with a level 1 recommendation with an application for IBS.



## **Get enough sleep and lower stress**

Sleep problems and stress are common in people with IBS.

### **Tips:**

- Try meditation and relaxation techniques (like deep breathing).
- Exercise regularly. Try walking, swimming, or yoga.
- Get enough rest and sleep. Stop watching TV and looking at your smart phone for at least 1 hour before going to sleep.
- Make time for yourself. Slow down and do something you enjoy to recharge your energy.
- Talk with your primary health care provider about ways to help you lower stress.

### **Everyone should do the following regularly:**

- Eat meals at regular times. Starting with breakfast, eat every 4 to 6 hours during the day.
- Eat enough fibre.
  - › Females: 21 to 25 g a day
  - › Males: 30 to 38 g a day
- Drink enough fluids (8 to 10 cups a day).
- Limit caffeinated drinks to 3 cups or less a day.
- Drink less alcohol.
- Lower your stress.

### **Do the following based on your symptoms:**

- Gas and bloating
  - › Avoid foods that cause gas.
- Cramping, pain, and loose poop
  - › Avoid fatty foods.
- Diarrhea
  - › Have more soluble fibre (like psyllium, oatmeal, and/or oat bran).
- Constipation
  - › Have more insoluble fibre (like wheat bran). Soluble fibre can help too.

## Food symptom diary

- If you do not know what food(s) causes your symptoms, keep a food symptom diary for 1 week. If you think a certain food bothers you, avoid it for 1 week to see if your symptoms get better. If your symptoms do not get better, you can start eating the food again.
- Since each person's symptoms are different, it is best to talk with a dietitian to help you through the process.

It can be hard to make changes to your eating habits.  
If you have any questions, please ask to talk with a dietitian.  
We are here to help you.

Dietitian: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

# Questions for my health care team:

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*Prepared by: Nutrition and Food Services*

*Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services*

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