

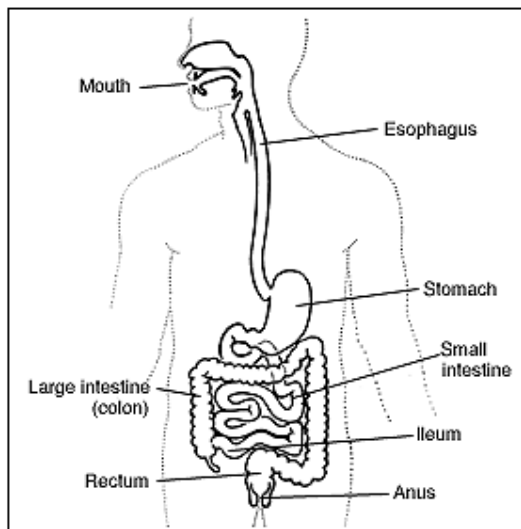
Irritable Bowel Syndrome (I.B.S.)

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a disorder that interferes with the normal functions of the large intestine (colon). The colon is near the end of the digestive canal and this is where the last stages of food processing take place before waste is passed out via the rectum and anus. In the colon, water, salts and minerals are removed from the digested food, with water passing both in and out of the walls of the colon through its delicate lining. Part of the function of the colon is to act as a balancer of body fluids.

What are the symptoms?

As the name suggests, IBS is not a disease, but a syndrome, recognised by a variety of symptoms, which vary between sufferers. In 1992, a group of bowel experts put together a description of the characteristic symptoms of IBS. There is a range of symptoms which can be experienced at different times:

- Bloating and gas
- Constipation – and/or passing less than three stools per week
- Diarrhoea, especially after eating or first thing in the morning – and/or passing more than three stools per day
- Feeling as if you still need to have a bowel movement after you've already had one
- Suddenly feeling a strong urge to have a bowel movement
- Abdominal pain, which may be severe, and cramping that may go away after having a bowel movement
- Erratic changes in frequency of bowel movements
- Very noisy tummy
- Mucus in the stool
- Nausea / loss of appetite



The symptoms may get worse when you're under stress, such as when you travel, attend social events or change your daily routine. Your symptoms may also get worse if you don't eat right or after you've eaten a big meal. Some people are bothered by certain foods. Women who have IBS may notice symptoms worsen during their menstrual periods. Although IBS is often chronic, symptoms can change over time, with IBS-free periods following spells of severe symptoms.

How serious is it?

For some sufferers, IBS is an inconvenience, but for others it can be totally disabling. IBS is usually considered a 'functional' bowel syndrome and is not the same as an inflammatory bowel disease like ulcerative colitis. Though it can cause a great deal of discomfort and distress, it does not harm the intestines and does not lead to cancer. It is not related to Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis, but your doctor may need to do some tests to make sure that your symptoms aren't caused by something other than IBS. Bleeding, fever, weight loss, and persistent severe pain (***all of which should be reported to a doctor***) are not symptoms of IBS and may indicate other problems such as inflammation or, rarely, cancer. An actual diagnosis of IBS is given when a more serious cause for the symptoms is not found.

One third of all adults in the UK have IBS symptoms at some point in their lives, and up to 20% of the population suffers from it for prolonged periods, making it one of the most common disorders diagnosed by doctors. It occurs more often in women than in men, and it often begins around age 20.

Most people can control their symptoms with diet, stress management, and medication. But for some people, IBS can be disabling. They may be unable to work, go to social events, or travel even short distances.

What causes it?

Symptoms of IBS have not been traced to a single organic cause. Research suggests that people with IBS seem to have a colon that is more sensitive and reactive than usual to a variety of things, including certain foods and stress. Some evidence indicates that the immune system, which fights infection, is also involved. **People with ME/CFS often experience irritable bowel symptoms.**

In IBS, the normal movements of the colon are not working properly. It can move in sudden, strong spasms (muscle contractions) or it can even stop temporarily.

As already noted, part of the function of the colon is to control fluid balance. However when spasms occur these can overcome the absorptive capacity of the colon, resulting in too much fluid in the stool. If on the other hand the movement is too slow, then too much fluid is absorbed, and constipation develops. The colon is very sensitive to stress, which can make symptoms worse. Additionally, certain foods may cause symptoms to get worse.

How is it treated?

Medications prescribed by GPs fall into four types:

- Anti-spasmodics
- Anti-diarrhoeals
- Fibre supplements
- Anti-depressants

All of these have been shown to be effective in the control of symptoms but none should be used permanently. Some are available over the counter (see below). Your GP should suggest lifestyle changes that will help too. GPs have varying views on the causes of IBS and varying degrees of knowledge about IBS and nutrition generally.

The Starch Connection

There is a theory, supported by some research, that dietary starch can play a key role in IBS. One reason for this could be that starch feeds the bacterium *Klebsiella*, for which people with IBS have elevated antibodies. Carol Sinclair, author of *The New IBS Starch Free Diet*, actually recommends a strategy of eliminating ALL starch from the diet if you have IBS. She even goes to the lengths of testing her food with an iodine dropper - a drop of iodine will turn dark in the presence of starch. (DO NOT eat the food with iodine on it!). If you have severe symptoms it is certainly worth investigating whether you are starch intolerant. If you eliminate all starch and you are starch-intolerant, you will notice a difference in the first 48 hours to 1 week, then depending on your reaction you can either add more back to your diet or cut it out altogether. Some foods you CAN eat on a starch-free diet are: all meat and dairy products, most fruits and vegetables, and some nuts.

The most common high-starch foods are usually pale and thick (like wallpaper paste). As well as potentially feeding bacteria in the gut, the gluten in starch can be an intestinal irritant for some people. The grain foods are certainly the worst offenders, and, amongst those, wheat seems to cause the most problems. In terms of starch content, grains to use in order of preference are:

Millet > Rice > Corn (maize) > Quinoa > Oats > Barley > Rye > Wheat

How can I control my IBS?

Many sufferers find that, in spite of the use of various remedies, the best solution is simply to avoid the foods which cause the worst symptoms – common culprits being, in addition to wheat products and starchy food, milk and dairy products, red wine, citrus fruits, spicy food, very fatty food, onions, beans, cucumbers and green peppers*, all of which, and probably more, can cause problems. (*green peppers are in fact UNRIPE red peppers so it makes sense to eat the ripened form – red peppers).

Food Diary: You may find it useful to keep an exact food and drink diary and relate that to your symptoms. This is a very useful tool and highly recommended for monitoring and controlling IBS. It is not recommended to do this for more than a couple of weeks, though, because it would be unhelpful to become obsessive about food. For others, keeping active within appropriate limits, and drinking lots of water, plus occasional prescription drugs that control colonic spasms, are the best ways of controlling symptoms.

General lifestyle tips

- Eat as varied a diet as you can amongst the foods you can tolerate
- Eat slowly and chew your food thoroughly
- Drink plenty of water, but not around mealtimes, so as not to dilute gastric juices.
- Try eating little and often rather than large meals.
- Learn new and better ways to deal with your stress.
- Avoid using laxatives. You may become dependent on them and your intestines may become weakened
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol and caffeine drinks
- Avoid high fat foods, which stimulate strong colon contractions

A high fibre diet is recommended because it helps keep the colon slightly distended, which has the effect of reducing the occurrence of abdominal spasms and constipation. The amount of fibre you need will depend on your personal experience. There are two types of fibre: *soluble* and *insoluble*. **Soluble fibre** can control both diarrhoea and constipation, whereas **insoluble fibre** tends to aggravate diarrhoea. Most cereals, vegetables and fruits contain insoluble fibre. Soluble fibre is found in oats, linseeds (flax seeds) and psyllium. Porridge is recommended.

Over the counter treatment

If you have IBS, your first port of call is to visit your doctor to get a diagnosis. The treatments for IBS vary and your doctor is best placed to recommend the right course of action. Sometimes it's a case of trying a number of treatments to see which one works best.

However, there are a number of over the counter products you can buy, following your doctor's diagnosis. They fall into three main areas:

Antispasmodic: These are products which help the cramping and abdominal pain. The ingredients are mebeverine, hyoscine, alverine and peppermint oil. The pharmacist will be able to advise on the most suitable brand for you.

Laxatives: The only laxative that is recommended for IBS over the counter is a fibre laxative such as those containing ispaghula husk or psyllium husk. This helps to soften the stools but it is not recommended other than in the short term.

Antidiarrhoeal: Products containing loperamide (such as Imodium) will help if you suffer from diarrhoea.

Natural and Alternative Remedies

Popular natural supplements and herbal remedies for controlling the symptoms of IBS include:

- Chamomile, for its soothing and anti-spasmodic effect on the digestive tract
- Peppermint oil, for its anti-spasmodic effect on the colon. Peppermint tea is also a good digestive
- Ginger is a safe digestive remedy especially appropriate for nausea
- Acidophilus, which reduces harmful bacteria in the gut, is available from health shops
- Grapefruit seed extract is used to counter both excessive bacteria and yeasts in the gut
- Psyllium, which relieves symptoms of constipation and diarrhoea
- Evening primrose, which may help reduce the worsening symptoms experienced by some women during menstruation
- Colonic irrigation can help, particularly if there is a co-existing candida problem
- acupuncture can relieve the symptoms of IBS, especially abdominal pain. It can also improve bowel function, reduce muscle spasms and have a generally relaxing effect
- Glutamine is an amino acid (protein) and it is the primary nutrient for the cells of the intestine. Our own bodies make this protein but it can be helpful to take extra in the

case of intestinal problems. It is available as a supplement you can buy in the form of L-glutamine.

- Essential Fatty Acids are vital for the health of the gut wall. These come from sources such as flax seeds, evening primrose, borage (star flower) and fish oils.
- Food combining can be very helpful indeed. There are many books on this subject but two basic principles are 1) separating proteins and carbohydrates as far as possible in your meals, and 2) eating fruit separately.
- Rice water can help settle the digestion – this is the water left after organic brown rice is cooked. After it has cooled, take a small cup every few hours.
- Taking digestive enzymes before meals helps to stimulate the digestion. Acidophilus is often recommended.
- Drink plenty of water – especially if you are constipated – but not at mealtimes.

Both **Medical Herbalism** and **Traditional Chinese Medicine** have much to offer IBS sufferers. It is important to see a properly registered practitioner and not to try for yourself anything other than simple remedies mentioned above. The practitioner will make a prescription based on your own personal needs, rather than general guidelines from a book or an article like this.

Rotation Diet

If there are certain foods that cause problems, then you may not have to cut them out altogether if you go easy on them. The rotation diet involves eating the 'dodgy' foods no more than once every four days – which makes sense anyway from the point of view of getting a varied diet. The foods which are most commonly not tolerated are:

Wheat, milk, corn, rye, eggs, citrus fruit, potato, peanuts, yeast, all dairy products, soya products, chocolate, coffee, tomato, malt, beef and pork.

Stress Management

Although stress can affect the bowel function of any healthy individual, its impact upon someone suffering from IBS tends to be far more pronounced. Because the colon is partially controlled by the nervous system, anxiety may worsen colonic spasms in those who suffer from IBS.

Relaxation, self-hypnosis and even anti-depressants have been found to help in the control of IBS, but remember that IBS also has physical causes that need to be addressed.

Regularly rub and stroke your abdomen in a clockwise direction to soothe the gut.

The Candida Connection

Though this is disputed by some GPs, many nutritionists and naturopaths believe that IBS can be caused by a disruption of the balance of bacteria and yeasts that live in the colon of all healthy people. And many people with ME are convinced by their own experience that tackling candida has been part of their recovery. (Note: if you have an obvious candida overgrowth such as vaginal thrush, then you must seek professional advice).

Candida is a natural yeast that only becomes a problem if it gets out of control. This can happen after a course of antibiotics, which can kill off bacteria whilst leaving the yeasts to flourish. If you have **ever** taken antibiotics you need to consider the candida connection and if you need to take a course of antibiotics in the future then do take a course of

probiotics afterwards (as is routinely prescribed by doctors in other countries) or at least eat lots of live yoghurt or a probiotic 'functional food' (see Resources).

Doctors differ in their views on this but many people with CFS/ME, and many professionals, believe that candida often goes hand in hand with CFS/ME. If bloating is one of your most troublesome symptoms, and if this worsens throughout the day, then candida overgrowth may be the cause. There are many anti-candida diets and strategies, involving ways of nourishing yourself without feeding the yeast, and in some cases taking anti-yeast preparations at the same time. This basically involves a low starch, no sugar diet which contains no added yeast, and it can mean eliminating fruit all together for a short period at first. **Such a diet must be undertaken under the direction of a qualified professional** but for information only, here is an outline:

- Eat lots of fresh vegetables and salads
- Eat whole grains only, and only to the extent you can tolerate, and not in the form of bread
- Eat satisfying amounts of whole beans and pulses (not in tomato sauce) and nuts and seeds.
- Meat, poultry, fish and eggs are acceptable within this regime
- Milk is not a good idea because of its lactose (sugar) content
- Eat fruit **separately** and not as part of a meal. Fruit is very quickly digested and need not be a problem, but eating it with, or after, other foods which take longer to digest, means that the fruit remains in the digestive tract and can therefore feed the candida.
- **Avoid** bread, pizza and savoury spreads, sweets, cakes, biscuits, pastries, canned foods and anything with added sugar (sucrose, fructose, glucose, dextrose, lactose), honey, molasses, maple syrup, all refined carbohydrates, fruit juices and dried fruits, citrus fruits (these contain acid which dilutes bile, an essential digestive juice produced by the liver), fizzy drinks, alcohol and foods which are themselves fungi or which are prone to mould – mushrooms, melons, and blue cheeses.

There are many natural and prepared anti-fungal agents that can be purchased from health shops and which can be used in conjunction with the anti-candida diet. Raw garlic is one of the best. Others include candididin, caprylic acid, berberine and grapefruit seed extract. If you are seriously engaging in an anti-candida regime then you do need to use probiotics as well, in order to recolonise the intestine with beneficial bacteria rather than let the candida take over again. Many people with CFS/ME have certainly found that an anti-candida regime has helped with their IBS symptoms and several books which address the candida problem are available in the Sheffield ME Group library.

Resources

Nature's Trail at Hunters Bar in Sheffield (0114 266 5984) and the **Nutricentre** in London (mail order – 020 7436 5122) are recommended for obtaining natural remedies. Both will give professional advice.

Biocare produce very good probiotics and digestive enzymes. Their products are available from the two sources mentioned above

Prime Directive from Safe Remedies is a probiotic combined with an organic superfood. It contains 12 different strains of bacteria which rebalance the gut flora. The product comes in a powder form with an explanatory CD available from SAFE REMEDIES, Unit 12 North Road Ind.Est., Berwick Upon Tweed TD 15 1UN. Tel 01289 332888 fax 01289 331888.

Imodium is an over-the-counter remedy which is recommended for acute attacks, and if you have a sympathetic doctor you may be able to get it on prescription.

Citricidal is a recommended brand of grapefruit seed extract. This is available from Higher Nature (01435 882 880) as well as some local health shops.

Yakult (dairy based) and **ProViva** (fruit based) are drinks which contain useful amounts of pro-biotics. Both are available in main supermarkets.

IBS Network

This is a national support group based in Sheffield – phone 0114 272 3253 or visit their excellent website which is the first one listed below.

Websites:

<http://www.theguttrust.org/home>

<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/pubs/irrbowel/irrbowel.htm>

<http://familydoctor.org/healthfacts/112/>

<http://www.digestivecare.co.uk>

<http://www.irritable-bowel-syndrome-treatments.com>

<http://www.candida-society.org.uk>