

Taking the agony out of IBS

At last! There's good news...

This debilitating condition affects a third of the population, but help is finally at hand...

What exactly is IBS?

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a combination of symptoms, including abdominal discomfort, diarrhoea, bloating and swelling. Dr Nick Read explains: 'If tests reveal there's nothing wrong with the gut, patients can be diagnosed with IBS. We don't actually know what causes these symptoms, but it can be intolerance to a particular food, or a reaction to stress, anxiety and/or depression. The stomach is very sensitive to psychological factors.'

Is IBS psychosomatic?

While IBS isn't necessarily a psychosomatic condition, it's important to consider what else is happening in someone's life when symptoms develop. Stress plays a big part as the mind and body are closely linked; when the mind is upset the body reacts.

Can certain foods trigger IBS?

Foods such as coffee and spicy dishes can trigger an attack because the gut is so sensitive, but it's different

for everyone. Cut down the amount of fibre in your diet – bran, for example – if you suffer from

diarrhoea and up your water intake if you have constipation.

Is it possible for children to develop IBS?

Yes, but it's usually known as infant colic. Your GP will rule out things like lactose intolerance, but as with adults, it's important to check that there's nothing upsetting them emotionally.

My friend says she has IBS so why do we have different symptoms?

Everyone's gut has their own particular way of expressing IBS – for some people that can be flatulence and for others it's constipation.

Are there any over-the-counter remedies?

There are some good anti-spasmodic, constipation and diarrhoea treatments but discuss your symptoms with your pharmacist first. Try Buscopan Cramps for stomach cramps, £4.39 for 20 tablets, from chemists; Dulcobalance, a new fruit-flavoured drink

for constipation, £4.99 for 10 sachets from www.dulcobalance.co.uk and Imodium for diarrhoea, £2.65 for six, from chemists.

Offal contains dietary nucleotides which help the body repair the gut lining, but if you can't face eating it, try IntestAid@IB tablets, £24.99 for 60, from Asda, Morrisons and health food stores.

What can my GP do?

Your doctor should talk to you about your symptoms and find out if you're unusually stressed before discussing treatment.

Do friendly bacteria help?

There are some good probiotic and prebiotics that some people find effective. Probiotics, such as Yakult, top up the good bacteria in your gut but you need to drink them every day. Prebiotics like Bimuno work by feeding the bugs in your gut enabling them to naturally grow good bacteria; you don't need to take these every day. From £8.99 in tablet and sachet form at www.bimuno.com

What if it's not IBS?

IBS is often confused with other illnesses which have similar symptoms, such as colitis, Crohn's or coeliac disease. It's important to know what's unusual for you. See your GP if you develop symptoms, such as blood in the stool, sudden weight loss, fever or severe sweating.

Dr Nick Read is a gastroenterologist and medical adviser to The Gut Trust. Visit www.theguttrust.org or call 0872 300 4537 on Tuesday and Thursday, 7.30pm-9.30pm.



IT WORKED FOR ME

'Changing my diet changed my life'



LISA HILL, 29,
FROM ANDOVER

Six months went by before I finally decided to go to my GP about my bloated, painful stomach - I just thought it was to do with periods or something.

Because he couldn't find anything wrong, he sent me to the hospital for a scan and tests. In the end the diagnosis was IBS.

I was shocked, I thought IBS was due to an unhealthy diet, but I felt I was very healthy. Doctors insisted that I keep a food diary, eliminating one item at a time, and eventually I recognised that white bread and pasta triggered my attacks. I also realised I was comfort eating - mostly cakes - when I was stressed. So I ended the relationship that was causing me stress, as well as cutting out the bad foods.

A year later I met Liam and am now pregnant with our second child. Following a careful diet has meant I've managed to stay IBS-free.

SYMPTOM CHECKER

1 Abdominal pain usually comes and goes but each bout varies and is often eased when you pass a stool.

2 Bloating meaning you may pass more wind than usual.

3 Stress or depression can have a major impact on your bowels and trigger the condition.

4 Constipation and diarrhoea Some people alternate between spells of diarrhoea and constipation, but if you notice blood in your stool see your GP immediately.

Other symptoms of IBS include headaches, nausea, tiredness, backache and muscle pain.



Eat to beat it...

Symptom

Avoid

Eat or drink

Diarrhoea

Tea or coffee, alcohol, fizzy drinks, fruit and juices, sorbitol, high-fibre foods, tinned or packet soups, processed foods, cook-in sauces, biscuits and cakes.



At least eight glasses of fluid a day (water, herbal teas, sugar-free squash) low-fibre foods, live yogurt or fermented milk drinks.



Constipation with wind and bloating

Alcohol, high-fibre foods (except oats and linseeds), tinned or packet soups, processed foods, cook-in sauces, biscuits and cakes.



At least eight glasses of fluid a day (water, herbal teas, sugar-free squash) low-fibre foods, plus oats and linseeds, live yogurt or fermented milk drinks.

Constipation without wind and bloating

Low-fibre foods (except meat, fish, soya protein, milk and dairy products).



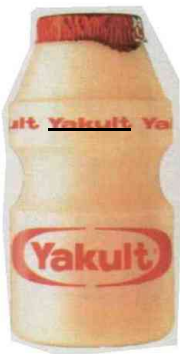
At least eight glasses of fluid a day (water, herbal teas, sugar-free squash), high-fibre foods.



Wind and bloating only

High-fibre foods (except oats and linseeds), alcohol, fizzy drinks, fruit and juices, tinned or packet soups, processed foods, cook-in sauces, biscuits and cakes.

At least eight glasses of fluid a day (water, herbal teas, sugar-free squash) low-fibre foods, plus oats and linseeds, live yogurt or fermented milk drinks.



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