

# Take Control of your IBS

Are you struggling with IBS?

Do you want to better understand your  
triggers and live well with the condition?

We've created this guide to help  
you take control of your IBS.





## What is IBS?

**Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is the name given to a longstanding condition consisting of frequent abdominal discomfort and bowel symptoms that doctors cannot explain by any other disease.**

**There is no specific cause for IBS and no single effective treatment. It is different for everyone so the symptoms one person experiences will be different for another. In the same way, what treatment works for one person won't work for another.**

## Get a diagnosis

IBS is a common disorder of the gut-brain interaction leading to abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhoea and/or constipation. If you are experiencing symptoms, please make an appointment with your GP.

Do not self-diagnose.

Once you have an IBS diagnosis, considering your diet and lifestyle is the first line treatment.

## How can I live well with IBS?

The key to living well with IBS is self-management. This means learning to recognise your triggers and understanding your symptoms. Once you have a better understanding of what is happening in your body you will be able to explore what treatments work best for you.

## How can I take control of my IBS?

Taking control of your IBS is about understanding your IBS and finding out what works for you. There is no cure for IBS but with support you can learn to manage the symptoms of IBS yourself. You can take back control with a combination of diet, stress management and medication. It may be challenging at times but with support and staying positive you will learn to manage your symptoms and live well with IBS.



## Make lifestyle and diet changes

Many people with IBS find that making lifestyle and diet changes has a positive impact on their IBS. We suggest you start by keeping a 12-week wellness diary.

### Keep a wellness diary

The IBS Network's wellness diary is an A5 diary designed to help people with IBS better understand their condition, symptoms and triggers. The 12-week diary helps you record what you are eating (food), how you are feeling (mood) and what's happening in your life (events).

As well as taking you step-by-step through the 12-week wellness process, the diary includes meal planners, healthy reminders and tips, personal stories, recipes, information on mindfulness, thinking positive, exercise, top tips for cooking for a sensitive gut, travel, and managing IBS at work. It encourages and helps you to consider your challenges and ways to overcome them to live better with IBS.







## Check your healthy eating and lifestyle

### DO:

- eat three to four regular meals a day;
- drink plenty of fluid, especially water or other non-caffeinated drinks;
- limit alcohol intake to no more than two units a day and have at least two alcohol free days a week;
- reduce intake of caffeine-containing drinks; and
- limit fresh fruit to three portions a day.

### DO NOT:

- skip any meals or eat late at night;
- drink fizzy drinks;
- eat a diet rich in fat such as chips, fast foods, pies, batter, cheese, pizza, creamy sauces; and
- eat snacks such as crisps, chocolate, cake and biscuits, spreads and cooking oils, and fatty meats such as burgers and sausages.

## Complete The IBS Network self-care programme

An IBS diagnosis can be devastating and confusing. To help, The IBS Network provides a FREE self-care programme. The comprehensive course includes information about the nature, causes and management of IBS.

## Take time to relax

Stress and anxiety can trigger an IBS flare up. It's not possible in our busy lives to completely be free of any stress or worries. However, try to take time to relax, whether that's through mindfulness, yoga, reading a book, listening to music or going for a walk or run. Keeping a wellness diary can help you identify times when you are particularly stressed or anxious. By knowing when you are likely to feel more stress you will be able to plan ways to manage the stress better.

## Consider probiotics

Probiotics are live cultures of strains of bacteria, similar to those that normally inhabit the colon. When the normal healthy populations of colonic bacteria are depleted by diarrhoea, often related to food poisoning, antibiotics or stress, probiotics may help to restore a healthy balance of bacteria.

Clinical studies have shown that some probiotics containing certain specific strains of bacteria may help to reduce some symptoms of IBS, particularly bloating and diarrhoea, in some patients, but there is not enough evidence on specific products.

The NICE guidelines for IBS suggest that probiotics be trialled for at least a month to ensure the best results. Our experts also recommend that if one probiotic is not effective for you, it is worth trying a couple more brands. If you have tried up to three different probiotics and they are giving you little relief from your symptoms, then it is unlikely that any other probiotic will help you.

## Be prepared when you're out and about

Make sure you're prepared for all those IBS emergencies when you're out and about. RADAR keys and can't wait cards are available from our online shop to help you gain access to toilets when you most need one. We also suggest carrying an IBS emergency kit with you including antibacterial sprays, coin towels, toilet sprays and spare underwear. We have a variety of products to help.

Visit our online shop [www.theibsnetwork.org/shop](http://www.theibsnetwork.org/shop)



## Speak to a professional

If you have tried the diet and lifestyle first line advice and are still struggling with your IBS talk to your GP again. You could ask your doctor to refer you to a specialist gastroenterology registered dietitian who is trained in the FODMAP diet. The IBS Network recommends that you only undertake an exclusion diet under the supervision of a dietitian. (To see a dietitian within the NHS you will need to be referred by your GP.)

At your first appointment with a dietitian, they will discuss with you what you are eating, any foods you have identified that may be causing your IBS symptoms to flare up and, as a result, any foods that you are excluding from your diet. They will then discuss treatment options with you. As you will probably know, there are no quick answers and finding the right way forward for you may take some time.

Members of The IBS Network also have access to our team of IBS specialists including gastroenterologists, IBS specialist dietitians, IBS nurses, pharmacists, cognitive behaviour therapists and hypnotherapists through our ask the experts service.







## Remember, you're not alone

If you've just been diagnosed with IBS or are experiencing a flare up of your condition, it's understandable to feel afraid and alone.

At The IBS Network we help and support people with IBS to live well with the condition. As a member, you'll have access to our team of specialist nurses and health professionals through our telephone helpline and ask the experts service.

If you'd like to speak to an IBS specialist nurse our helpline is available three evenings a week.

**For more information and advice about IBS  
visit our website: [www.theibsnetwork.org](http://www.theibsnetwork.org)**

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The IBS Network is a registered charity in England and Wales. Charity number 1173208.

