

## Managing Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

This resource is for patients experiencing gut symptoms associated with irritable bowel syndrome.

### What is irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)?

Irritable bowel syndrome describes a group of gut symptoms. Your symptoms may link to eating certain foods, lifestyle habits, your mood and stress, or a mix of these.

### Common symptoms of IBS

- Fluctuating abdominal pain and discomfort.
- Gas and bloating.
- Altered bowel habits.
- Constipation (less frequent, difficult to pass stools).
- Diarrhoea (frequent, loose stools).

Remember that symptoms may vary from one person to another and can change over time.

### How to manage your IBS

Make healthy changes to your eating and lifestyle habits to help your IBS symptoms. There is no 'one size fits all' approach in managing IBS. Your Dietitian will give you specific advice for your symptoms.

### General healthy habits

- Eat regular meals and snacks throughout the day to support healthy gut function.
- Eat home cooked meals made from fresh ingredients, rather than processed foods.
- Take your time when eating meals. Eat slowly and chew your food well to support digestion.

- Give yourself enough time to use the toilet so you don't need to rush or strain. Follow the cues your body gives you.
- Use the correct toileting position shown in the picture to the right. Lean forward with your back straight. Then place your elbows on your thighs or knees. Raise your feet with a footstool, so your knees are higher than your hips.



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### **Reducing common dietary triggers**

There are some foods and drinks that are common triggers for IBS symptoms. Make small changes to your diet to help improve your gut symptoms.

- Limit alcohol to no more than two standard drinks per day, with two alcohol-free days per week.
- Limit caffeine to less than three cups a day (including tea, coffee and cola).
- Limit soft drinks (including diet soft drinks) and energy drinks.
- Limit rich or fatty foods (including chips, fast food, and fatty meats, such as burgers and sausages).
- Limit spicy food.
- Limit excess sweeteners, such as in chewing gum, and diet drinks. Examples of sweeteners are aspartame, sorbitol and mannitol.

### **Drinking enough fluid and eating enough fibre**

Drink plenty of fluid and eat enough fibre to keep your bowels regular.

- Drink at least eight cups of water or non-caffeinated drinks each day.
- Eat foods high in fibre through the day, such as fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, nuts and seeds.

## Other helpful hints

- Exercise for at least 30 minutes 5 times a week to help move food through your digestive system. For example: walking, swimming and cycling.
- Write a diary of the foods you eat, with the moods and symptoms you feel. This will help you find which foods help or worsen your symptoms.
- Your mood and stress levels can affect your gut and bowel habits. Take some time during your day to do an activity that helps you relax or de-stress. For example, meditating, going for a walk outside or reading a book. Talk to your doctor about your mood and stress levels, they may send you to a psychologist who is trained in gut symptoms.

## Role of probiotics

Probiotic supplements, yoghurts, or fermented milk drinks may help reduce IBS symptoms. If you choose to try them, take probiotics every day for at least four weeks. If they do not seem to help, you may consider another brand or stopping the supplement altogether.

## Low FODMAP diet

Talk to your doctor if you are still having symptoms after following general advice. You may be recommended to try a low FODMAP diet (a diet that helps identify food triggers). Ask your doctor to send you to a dietitian to help you try this diet safely.

## Summary

1. Eat regular home cooked meals and snacks through the day.
2. Eat slowly and chew food well.
3. Avoid common dietary triggers.
4. Drink plenty of water and eat foods high in fibre through the day.
5. Exercise for 30 minutes 5 times a week
6. Keep a food, mood and symptom diary to help find food triggers.
7. Manage your mood and stress levels, and consider seeing a psychologist.
8. If you are still having symptoms, talk to your doctor and dietitian about a low FODMAP diet.

**For further information contact your dietitian or nutritionist:** \_\_\_\_\_