

# Diet Basics for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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## **What is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)?**

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common gastrointestinal condition that affects about 12% of the Canadian population.

The most common symptom of IBS is abdominal discomfort. Altered bowel habits such as constipation and/or diarrhea are very common as well.

Other common symptoms of IBS can include:

- Abdominal bloating
- Abdominal distention
- Excess gas
- Bowel urgency
- Sensation of incomplete bowel movement

The symptoms of IBS can range from mild to severe. For people that have severe symptoms, IBS can sometimes be difficult to cope with.

The main underlying cause of IBS is not yet known. While IBS can cause symptoms, it is not known to cause damage to the bowel or lead to more serious disease.

## **Dietary therapy for IBS**

Dietary changes can often help reduce IBS symptoms.

Sometimes only a few dietary changes are needed to help manage symptoms. For example, if your symptoms are mild, limiting some common dietary triggers for IBS symptoms may be all that is needed.

Some common dietary triggers for IBS symptoms include:

- Alcoholic beverages
- Caffeine
- High fat or greasy foods (e.g. many fast foods, deep fried foods)
- Large meals or irregular eating patterns
- Spicy foods

### Can dairy foods increase IBS symptoms?

About 40% of people with IBS can experience symptoms when consuming some dairy foods. This is usually due to lactose intolerance.

#### Lactose Intolerance

Lactose intolerance occurs when the body does not make enough **lactase**. Lactase is a digestive enzyme that is needed to digest the sugar lactose found in most dairy foods (e.g. milk).

If the body does not make enough lactase to digest lactose, symptoms can occur when high lactose dairy foods are consumed. The most common symptoms are abdominal discomfort, bloating, distention, excess gas and diarrhea.



*How do you know if you have lactose intolerance?*

To confirm if you have lactose intolerance, a physician can send you for a lactose intolerance test (blood test or in some cases a breath test).

If a lactose intolerance test has not been done or is not available, you can try removing high lactose dairy foods from your diet for a period of 2 - 4 weeks (see list of high lactose dairy foods). If your symptoms improve when these foods are removed from your diet, this suggests you may have lactose intolerance. To help confirm if you have lactose intolerance, add high lactose dairy foods back into your diet to see if your symptoms increase again.

## High lactose dairy foods

- regular and low-fat milk (cow, goat, sheep), skim milk powder, evaporated milk, buttermilk, sweetened condensed milk, malted milk
- cream (light cream, half and half, whipping cream)
- cream sauces, cream soups, sour cream
- Feta cheese, fresh cheeses (e.g. Ricotta, Cottage), processed cheese, cheese spreads
- ice cream, sherbet, puddings, custards
- regular and low-fat yogurt, kefir



If lactose intolerance is confirmed, limiting high lactose dairy foods can often help reduce symptoms. If you do not have lactose intolerance, high lactose dairy foods do not need to be limited.

Many people with lactose intolerance can often tolerate a small amount of lactose. Therefore if you have lactose intolerance, you may still be able to include smaller amounts of high lactose foods in your diet without increasing IBS symptoms. It may take some time or trial and error to figure out much of these foods you can tolerate.

Lactase enzyme supplements (e.g. Lactaid® tablets) are available over-the-counter at most pharmacies. These supplements can help improve tolerance of high lactose foods if you have lactose intolerance. Follow the directions on the product label if used.



Lactose-free versions of some dairy products are also available. For example, instead of regular milk or yogurt, look for milk or yogurt labelled as 'lactose-free' in your grocery store.

## High FODMAP foods

Foods that are high in FODMAPs (fermentable carbohydrates) can often increase symptoms for people with IBS, particularly when consumed in large amounts. These symptoms can include abdominal discomfort, abdominal bloating and distention, excess gas, bowel urgency and diarrhea.

### Examples of some high FODMAP foods

- apple
- beans and legumes (e.g. kidney beans, soy milk)
- cabbage
- candies and sweets
- cauliflower
- sweet corn (corn kernels) *note: field corn is usually well tolerated (e.g. corn pasta, corn flour, corn flakes, polenta, corn chips, etc.)*
- fruit juices
- soft drinks and sugar-sweetened beverages
- garlic
- honey
- wheat (when consumed in larger amounts)
- onion
- pear
- prunes
- sugar-free gum



If you notice high FODMAP foods increase your IBS symptoms, limiting these foods can often help you manage your symptoms.

The list of high FODMAP foods provided is only a partial list of high FODMAP foods. If your IBS symptoms are still not well controlled and you are motivated to try further dietary changes, one option is to try a 6-8 week FODMAP elimination diet. The FODMAP elimination diet is diet that removes *all* high FODMAP foods for 6-8 weeks. If your symptoms improve on the FODMAP elimination diet, then high FODMAP foods are gradually added back into your diet to test your tolerance to these foods and increase the variety of food in your diet.

If you are interested in trying a FODMAP elimination diet, it is recommended that you ask your physician for a referral to a registered dietitian to help you with this. A registered dietitian with experience in the low FODMAP diet can help you manage elimination and re-introduction phase of this diet approach for optimal results and also help ensure adequate nutrition intake while on this diet.

## What about probiotics?

Some people with IBS may find some symptom improvement with use of a probiotic supplement. Probiotic supplements are available at pharmacies or in most health food stores. Usually a 2-3 month period of taking a probiotic supplement is long enough to see if there will be any improvement in your IBS symptoms.

Probiotics are generally safe to use, however some probiotics may contain added high FODMAP ingredients. High FODMAP ingredients may worsen IBS symptoms for some people. Therefore when choosing a probiotic supplement for IBS, it is generally best to avoid products that contain any of the following added high FODMAP ingredients: FOS, inulin, or chicory root extract.



## Constipation

If you have IBS with constipation, the following suggestions may help:

- ✓ Drink enough fluids. Try to consume at least 8 cups (2 litres) of fluid per day
- ✓ Keep physically active
- ✓ Include high-fibre low FODMAP grain products in your diet as tolerated e.g. quinoa, rolled oats, oatmeal, steel cut oats, oat bran, brown rice, wild rice, rice bran, millet, whole grain cornmeal or buckwheat
- ✓ Include low FODMAP nuts and/or seeds in your diet (e.g. ¼ cup a day) as tolerated (cashews, pistachio nuts and almonds are high in FODMAPs and may not be tolerated as well)
- ✓ Try adding flaxseeds (ground or whole), chia seeds, or hemp seeds to help increase the fibre in your diet. These can be added to various foods, e.g. shakes and smoothies, yogurts, cereals, soups, salads, and most cooked dishes. Start with a smaller amount e.g. 1 teaspoon, and increase as tolerated. Up to 2 tablespoons of chia seeds and hemp seeds, or 1 tablespoon of flaxseed at a time is generally tolerated by most people with IBS.

### Low FODMAP high fibre shake

- 250 ml rice or almond milk, or if lactose is restricted also lactose-free milk
- 1 tbsp of nut or seed butter (optional)
- 1-2 tbsp of chia seeds, or hemp seeds, or ground or whole flaxseed (can adjust amount depending on tolerance)
- 1 medium or ½ cup of low FODMAP fruit
- 2 ice cubes

*Blend and serve. Provides approx. 6 - 10g fibre per recipe*

- ✓ Include at least 3 servings (1 serving = ½ cup, or 1 cup raw leafy vegetables) of low FODMAP vegetables in your diet per day e.g. bok choy, squash, carrots, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, green and red bell pepper, lettuce or greens, okra, parsnip, radish, spinach, sweet potato, tomato, turnip, zucchini
- ✓ Include 3 servings (1 serving = ½ cup or 1 medium-sized fruit) of low FODMAP fruit in your diet per day e.g. banana, blueberries, cantaloupe, grapefruit, grapes, honeydew melon, kiwi, orange, papaya, pineapple, raspberries, strawberries

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

905-378-4647 ext. \_\_\_\_\_

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