

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)



By Catherine Rabess BSc Hons. RD

Specialist Dietitian in gastroenterology and complex nutrition support

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a term used to describe a combination of gut symptoms. It is also now considered a disorder of the gut:brain axis, that can be exacerbated by stress or anxiety.



How is IBS diagnosed?

The global prevalence of IBS in the general population is estimated to be 5–20%, often more common in women² and generally affecting a younger population. Common symptoms experienced include:

- Recurrent abdominal pain or discomfort (usually worse after eating)
- Bloating or distention
- Change in bowel habit (diarrhoea and/or constipation)
- Flatulence

The underlying cause of IBS remains unknown, but it is multifactorial, and the symptom severity fluctuates with everyone. As IBS is a diagnosis of exclusion, there are no specific tests for it. IBS characterised by a group of associated symptoms, further tests and investigations are needed to support the clinical diagnosis.

An assessment for IBS should be considered if the person has experienced the above symptoms for at least six months. NICE (2020)³ state a diagnosis for IBS should be considered if there is abdominal pain or discomfort that is relieved by defecation or linked with changes in stool frequency (increased or decreased) and/or altered by stool appearance or form (hard, lumpy, loose or watery). Also, these should be accompanied by at least two of the following:

- 1 Alternative conditions with similar symptoms have been excluded.
- 2 Passage of rectal mucus.
- 3 Symptoms worsened by eating.
- 4 Abdominal bloating (more common in women than men), distension, or hardness.
- 5 Altered stool passage (straining, urgency, or incomplete evacuation).

IBS classification

IBS may be classified by the predominant stool type according to the Rome IV criteria⁴ into the following sub-types. However these are no longer considered distinct disorders, but exist on a spectrum depending on the person's quantity, intensity, and severity of different symptoms⁵:

IBS-D

Diarrhoea predominant (IBS-D), which is the most common sub-type

IBS-C

Constipation predominant (IBS-C)

IBS-M

Mixed, fluctuating between diarrhoea and constipation (IBS-M)

IBS-U

Unclassified (IBS-U)

Dietary and lifestyle tips and tricks

Initial management of a person with IBS should include dietary and lifestyle advice including⁶:

- ✓ Avoid skipping meals or eating late at night (smaller meal sizes may ease symptoms).
- ✓ Limit alcohol intake to no more than two units per day and have at least two alcohol free days a week.
- ✓ Reduce intake of caffeine-containing drinks to no more than two mugs a day. This includes energy drinks, coke, tea and coffee.
- ✓ Aim to meet your fluid through water or other non-caffeinated drinks such as herbal tea. Reduce intake of fizzy drinks, especially ones with artificial sweeteners as these may make symptoms worse; bloating/wind and diarrhoea.

- ✓ Cut down on rich or fatty foods such as chocolate, cake, biscuits, pies, pizza, fried fast food.
- ✓ Reduce your intake of highly processed foods such as those mentioned above as well as pastries, burgers, sausages, cured meats and sweets. Cook from fresh ingredients where possible.
- ✓ Dietary fibre manipulation may need to be explored with a registered health professional to help manage symptoms.

Other helpful tips include:

- Managing any associated stress, anxiety, and/or depression appropriately.
- Considering a trial of probiotics, natural yoghurts or fermented drinks containing live cultures or over the counter supplements for at least four weeks.
- Trying soluble fibre supplements (ispaghula/psyllium husk) or foods high in soluble fibre, if there are predominant symptoms of constipation, such as oats or linseeds.
- Encouraging regular physical activity.

Specific dietary changes can be made based on an individual's symptom; however, it is important to recommend a small number of changes at one time to help with identifying what may have helped.

Onwards referrals may also be necessary to a gastroenterologist for further investigation. A referral to a specialist dietitian for a low FODMAP diet or exclusion and reintroduction diet may be appropriate if first line advice has been unsuccessful.

A referral to mental health services for psychological support and intervention with cognitive behavioural therapy should also be considered, where appropriate.

Conclusion

Symptoms of IBS can affect quality of life and can fluctuate without explanation. A hectic lifestyle, anxiety and stress can all affect the gut function, which in turn may increase your symptoms. As IBS can be difficult to treat, diet and lifestyle changes can be very helpful to help alleviate symptoms and long-term management of the condition. For more information, check out the British Dietetic Association who has developed a resource on [IBS and diet](#).

Where to find Quorn mycoprotein

Quorn mycoprotein is the unique whole food at the heart of every single Quorn product. There is a huge range of great tasting Quorn® products and ingredients available, all of which can easily be used to recreate your favourite recipes with a nutritious and sustainable twist.

Visit www.quornnutrition.com and www.quorn.com for more information about Quorn mycoprotein, products and recipes.

References:

1. Ford, A.C. and Talley, N.J. (2012) Irritable Bowel Syndrome. British Medical Journal 4(345), 1-8. [Abstract]
2. Lovell, R.M. and Ford, A.C. (2012) Effect of gender on prevalence of irritable bowel syndrome in the community: systematic review and meta-analysis. Am J Gastroenterol 107(7), 991-1000. [Abstract]
3. NICE (2020) Irritable Bowel Syndrome [online] <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/irritable-bowel-syndrome/diagnosis/diagnosis/>
4. Drossman, D.A. (2016) Functional gastrointestinal disorders: history, pathophysiology, clinical features, and Rome IV. Gastroenterology 150, 1262-1279. [Abstract]
5. NICE (2017) Irritable bowel syndrome in adults: diagnosis and management. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. <http://www.nice.org.uk>
6. BDA (2019) Irritable Bowel Syndrome Diet [online] <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/irritable-bowel-syndrome-diet.html>