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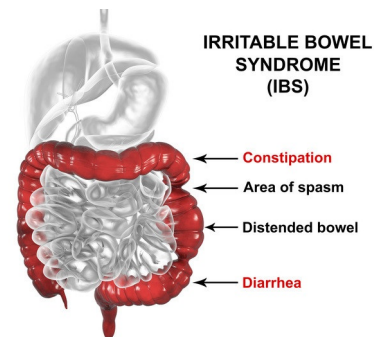
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EATING FOR IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome)

People with IBS have colons that react to stimuli that do not affect normal colons, and their reactions are far more severe. The result is heightened pain sensitivity and abnormal gut motility—meaning, irregular or increased muscle contractions in one’s gastrointestinal (GI) tract. This overreaction and hypersensitivity cause the standard IBS symptoms: lower abdominal pain, extreme cramping, diarrhea (often sudden and explosive), gas, and bloating. Further, constipation may follow an attack as the colon “shuts down” in response to the spasms, and can then become an ongoing separate problem.



The fundamental idea for those with IBS is to avoid foods that over-stimulate the colon, and eat foods that soothe and regulate it. This is best accomplished by strictly limiting the amount of fat, eating certain kinds of fiber with every snack and meal, as well as being very careful with other kinds of fiber (more about these differences in a minute); eliminating coffee, all carbonated beverages, and alcohol; and avoiding overeating by having frequent, small meals throughout the day. (Also, if someone smokes, *that* is a great irritant to one’s GI tract.

The most difficult foods for the body to digest are fats, meats, and dairy products and, as a result, they are the most powerful IBS triggers and must strictly be limited or eliminated altogether from one’s diet. Individual tolerances for IBS trigger foods may vary, but the following are all potential sources of trouble.

Red Meat (Beef, Pork, Lamb, etc.). Red meat is very high in fat, difficult to digest, and one of the strongest IBS triggers.

Poultry Dark Meat and Skin. The fat content in poultry dark meat (thigh, leg) and skin makes them powerful triggers. Skinless white meat is not a trigger, but **an IBS sufferer should try to buy organic poultry only**, as the drugs used in commercial poultry farms can have effects on the GI tract.

Dairy Products. All dairy products—milk, butter, cheese, ice cream, yogurt, and so on—and particularly those that are high fat, are very difficult to digest, even if an IBS sufferer is not lactose intolerant. Dairy is second only to red meat as an IBS trigger. Use low-fat soy, rice, almond or oat substitutes for all dairy milk as well as for cream cheese, sour cream, ice cream and other dairy products.

Egg Yolks. The high fat content in egg yolks makes them a powerful trigger. Use only egg whites, and **try to buy organic**.

Fried Foods. There is no such thing as a low-fat fried food and, as such, anything fried is an IBS trigger. (You can get crispy, crunchy results from oven baking or non-stick pan frying, with very little oil or only using cooking spray.)

Oils, Shortening, Fats, Butter, Margarine. IBS does not distinguish between extra virgin olive oil and lard! All fats are IBS triggers. Use only fat-free salad dressings, mayonnaise, and so on.

Artificial Fats. These products, particularly Olestra, can cause severe abdominal cramping and diarrhea.

Solid Chocolate. Solid chocolate has a very high fat content and is a trigger.

Coffee, Regular and Decaffeinated. Coffee beans contain an enzyme that is such a powerful GI tract irritant it can cause abdominal cramps and diarrhea in people who do not even have IBS. In addition, the high amount of caffeine in coffee can also trigger IBS attacks. (Peppermint, chamomile, fennel or gingerroot teas are safe alternatives.)

Alcohol. This is a strong irritant to every organ in the digestive tract. One's tolerance level for alcohol varies widely depending on the type of drink and whether the consumption is alone or with meals. An IBS sufferer might have a very different reaction to a martini on an empty stomach than a glass of wine with dinner. It is always safest not to drink at all. Small amounts of alcohol used for flavor in cooking is usually quite safe.

Carbonated Beverages. The carbonation in soda and mineral water can cause bloating and abdominal cramps, and the artificial sweeteners found in diet sodas can compound the problem. (The high amount of caffeine in some sodas is also a trigger.)

Artificial Sweeteners. All artificial sweeteners can cause abdominal cramps, pain and diarrhea. Sorbitol is the worst of all.

Gum. If an IBS sufferer is prone to bloating, chewing gum should be avoided because it can cause one to swallow a lot of air.

FIBER. The term "fiber" refers to a wide variety of substances found in plants. Some of these substances can be dissolved in water (*soluble fiber*) while others do not dissolve (*insoluble fiber*). Insoluble fiber is "rough" or "coarse" and can be found in bran, whole grains, raw fruits and vegetables, greens, sprouts, beans, nuts and seeds—in essence, the healthiest foods in the world are high in insoluble fiber. Soluble fiber is "smooth," and soothing to the digestive tract. Soluble fiber food choices, often high in carbohydrates (white rice, pastas, refined grains, potatoes, etc) can act as safe foundation foods for people with IBS.

Insoluble fiber, like fat, is a very powerful GI tract stimulant and is big trouble for those with IBS. However, IBS sufferers cannot simply minimize their insoluble fiber intake, because that would leave them with a very unhealthy diet. Insoluble fiber is crucial for good health, and it is much better to have a wide variety of insoluble fiber foods in small amounts than not to eat any at all. IBS sufferers are likely to find their tolerance for insoluble fiber will increase if they are consistently eating it, even in tiny portions. Most importantly, **insoluble fiber foods should never be eaten alone and never on an empty stomach.**

The difference in soluble vs. insoluble fibers in foods can be confusing because many foods contain both. Grains and cereals especially have insoluble fiber in their outer layers but soluble fiber in the interior. This is also true for many fruits, vegetables, beans and lentils as well (the skins are insoluble, the interior flesh soluble).

Raw fruits, raw vegetables, raw greens, raw sprouts, seeds are all very high in insoluble fiber. It helps tremendously to cook, peel, chop, seed, dice, and/or puree most or even all of them. This will remove the toughest insoluble fiber, making it dramatically less likely to trigger attacks. If possible, buy organic produce because chemicals used on fruits and vegetables can have adverse effects. It also helps to eat fruits and vegetables *toward the end of a meal*. This is especially important when it comes to green salads. Eating them, as is customary, on an empty stomach at the beginning of lunch or dinner, is likely to trigger an attack.

Two categories of fruits and vegetables, those are *acidic* and *sulfur-containing*, require extra precautions.

Citrus fruits and juices, and cooked tomatoes have very high acidity levels, which cause GI distress, so they must be eaten with care. Incorporate them into meals (or drinks served with meals) with a high soluble fiber content, and do not eat them on an empty stomach.

Garlic, onions, leeks, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and Brussels sprouts can also pose problems. In addition to their high amounts of insoluble fiber, all contain sulfur compounds, which produce gas in the GI tract and can thus trigger

attacks. Cook until tender, combine them with soluble fiber, and don't eat them when your stomach is completely empty.

Whole wheat and wheat bran are extremely high in insoluble fiber, and foods such as whole wheat breads and cereals need to be eaten with great care. Again, do not eat these foods on an empty stomach, in large quantities, or without soluble fiber foods.

Fresh fruit juices, especially apple, prune and grape can trigger cramps and diarrhea. Fruit juices in general should be avoided on an empty stomach; cranberry juice is usually a safe choice.

Rhubarb, prunes, figs and licorice are all natural laxatives. As with fresh fruits, they can be incorporated safely into recipes with soluble fiber.

Popcorn is full of hard kernels that are pure insoluble fiber. There is no great nutritional value to popcorn so it can, and should, simply be eliminated from an IBS diet.

SUMMARY of Helpful Hints

- Eat soluble fiber first whenever your stomach is empty.
- Chew your food thoroughly. This helps prevent eating too fast and swallowing air.
- Eat small portions of food; eating large amounts in one sitting can trigger an attack.
- Eat frequently; the emptier the stomach is, the more sensitive it is.
- Avoid chewing gum; it causes you to swallow excess air.
- Drink fresh water constantly throughout the day; make sure it's not ice cold.
- Eat small portions of green salads with fat-free dressing at the end of a meal, not the beginning.
- Peel, skin, chop and cook fruits and vegetables.
- Use only egg whites, and try to buy organic.
- Avoid red meat.
- Avoid dark poultry. Eat white poultry without skin only.
- Avoid fried foods.
- Avoid artificial sweeteners.
- Avoid dairy. Substitute low-fat soy, rice, almond or oat milk for dairy milk as well as for cream cheese, sour cream, ice cream and other dairy products.
- Avoid fats. Use non-stick pans and cooking sprays. Use only fat-free salad dressings, mayonnaise, and so on.
- Avoid coffee (regular or decaf), alcohol and all carbonated beverages. (Peppermint is a smooth muscle relaxant and can prevent and relieve IBS spasms. Drink lots of strong, hot mint tea throughout the day—except if you have GERD or suffer from heartburn.)
- Avoid popcorn.

A last word on Soluble Fiber

There are many over-the-counter “powder” products that are soluble fiber, which can be extremely helpful when taken daily. Just make sure the one you might use is NOT of the sugar-free varieties, which have artificial sweeteners in them and can trigger IBS attacks. Although some of these products are marketed as laxatives, technically they are not; they actually help treat and prevent diarrhea as well as constipation.

There is also soluble fiber in a pill form. These are generally not as effective as the soluble fiber powders, but it is easier to carry in your purse or pocket and does provide a measure of protection in emergency situations.

When purchasing either powder or pills, **always consult with your physician**; and, of course, your local pharmacist could provide education and direction as well.

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10/31/19