

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a chronic disorder, which causes the bowel or gut to be over sensitive. The main featuring symptoms are:

- Abdominal pain and tenderness, especially on the left side, or across the lower abdomen
- Bloating and fullness of wind
- Constipation
- Diarrhoea
- Alternating between one and the other
- A sensation of having to rush to the toilet
- Pain is relieved by defecation (opening the bowels)
- Lethargy
- Headaches

The disorder commonly affects people between the ages of 20 and 30 and is twice as common in women as in men. In general, up to one in five adults suffer from IBS and 60 % of patients that see a specialist gastroenterologist.

Nobody really knows what causes IBS. Sometimes the colon is seen to be in a state of unusual activity, contracting and relaxing in an abnormally rapid way, hence the pain and discomfort. This is also the reason why so many sufferers can hear bowel noises – loud rumblings and squeaking, it is caused by gases being propelled through the intestines by peristalsis. The colon muscle of a person with IBS begins to spasm after only mild stimulation and is more sensitive than usual. It is also well known that IBS could be a mind-body disease, meaning that symptoms may be worse when under psychological stress or even when the body is physically stressed, e.g. by an infection or exhaustion.

There are a number of treatments and approaches; it is usually a case of experimentation to find what suits that particular individual.

These are the main medications that could be prescribed or suggested:

- Antispasmodics (reduces the spasm in the wall of the bowel)
- Peppermint oil in concentrated form
- Pain killers
- Mild antidepressants
- Probiotics

Other treatments or approaches:

- Self help and support groups
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Hypnotherapy
- Relaxation exercises (yoga and pilates)
- Peppermint oil

The other big question – should you follow a special diet?

There is no “ideal” diet, which will bring relief to each and every IBS sufferer. These are some changes that you can try; they could well help to relieve some symptoms:

- Eat regular meals. Avoid erratic eating patterns, avoid indulging; avoid rich, fatty or spicy meals
- Drink plenty. Aim to drink at least eight glasses a day, include, mineral water, diluted fruit juice, herb or fruit teas, avoid having huge quantities of ordinary coffee and tea, avoid fizzy drinks
- Focus on your fibre intake. Altering the amount and or type of fibre you eat may help, you might need more fibre or it could be that you need less fibre.

- Food intolerances:

Some people with IBS may be intolerant to some foods; some of the culprits could be dairy products and wheat

Be cautious before you make any major dietary changes. Before you embark on excluding all sorts of foods remember not to exclude whole food groups out of your diet as there could be a risk of vitamin and mineral deficiency. It might be a good idea to consult a professional for advice.

Always remember not to make too many changes at once; you will then not know what works and what doesn't.

Tap into self-help and support groups for IBS, the support and information will be valuable.

Have you visited the IBS forum? -

<http://buddypower.net/forum/viewforum.php?f=48&sid=4424ba0a392e828d1421a2d94d644f19>

It's a good place to share tips, ideas and generally talk with other IBS sufferers - you're not alone!