

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) – Fact Sheet

IBS is a disorder that involves altered functions in the activity of the enteric nervous system affecting the gastrointestinal tract, which causes discomfort for many people worldwide. It usually presents in people between the ages 20-30 years, however some people may experience intermittent attacks from a younger age. The cause of IBS is unknown, however there are many theories as to why people may suffer and develop this disorder. Theories include:

- Gut-Brain Axis
 - It is common for IBS sufferers to have an increase in sympathetic nervous function (fight or flight) and a decrease in parasympathetic nervous function (rest and digest). Stress is often a trigger for IBS patients as it over-stimulates the sympathetic nervous system which as a result interferes with the digestion of food causing pain, discomfort and changes in bowel movements.
- Abnormal gastrointestinal motility and secretion
 - Differences in colonic transient times.
- Altered serotonin production
 - 95% of serotonin is active in the gastrointestinal (GI) track. Serotonin is essential for the brain and gut and controls mood. Altered production leads to changes in bowel movements, gut secretions and gut sensitivity.
- Infection
 - Infections can disrupt the normal microflora and cause mucosal inflammation and damage, which can increase the risk of developing IBS.
- Alterations to Gut Flora
 - Antibiotics, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, contraceptive pill, physical and psychological stress and poor diet can all alter gut flora and cause damage to the good bacteria.
- Food Hypersensitivity/ Intolerance
 - Consuming foods that result in inflammation and pain can damage the gut wall and make the GI tract hypersensitive.

Signs and Symptoms

There are various and numerous signs and symptoms that can be experienced. Some include:

- **Local:** abdominal pain or cramping, alternating diarrhoea and constipation, abdominal bloating, mucus present in stools, sensation of not fully emptying bowels, nausea and gas.
- **Systemic:** fatigue, unexplained weight loss, decreased appetite, stomach pain, blood in stool and fever.
- **Mental:** depressed mood, anxiety and stress.

Nutritional Recommendations

- Try to avoid lactose and fructose and other short chain carbohydrates if affected.
- Avoid trigger foods such as; coffee, alcohol, excessively fatty food, sugar, brassica vegetables, legumes, beans, onions, garlic and gluten containing foods.
- Incorporate more insoluble and soluble fibre into diet.
- Drink plenty of water – at least 2 litres per day.
- Eat adequate protein.
- Eat lots of fresh fish.

Other Suggestions:

- Add slippery elm, flaxseed or psyllium husk to meals and drinks to absorb excess water in bowels and to soothe the GI track.
- Drink teas such as (chamomile, ginger, peppermint, liquorice and dandelion) can assist with relief of symptoms.
- Digestive enzymes, probiotics and prebiotics to help with food digestion and increasing the quantity of good bacteria.
- Regular exercise and the management of stress and other psychosocial factors will also help with the overall management of IBS.
- Try the Low FODMAP diet, often people find relief by taking out foods that can be triggers, however it is harder to identify the exact triggers of your IBS.

Customised nutritional plans comprising of a specific food plan with the support of nutrient/herbal supplements can be very effective in the management of IBS. Food intolerance testing has also been a very effective test in identify trigger foods. If you require support please visit

www.good4younutrition.com.au