



Nutrition and Dietetics

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) with constipation, wind and bloating

What is IBS with constipation, wind and bloating?

You may find that you do not empty your bowels as often as you would like which causes you to feel uncomfortable and bloated. Typical symptoms may be:

- feeling full or bloated, this may get worse during the day
- not emptying your bowels completely
- having to strain to pass stools
- abdominal pain or pain when passing stools; this may ease once you have opened your bowels
- stools may be hard or lumpy
- passing more wind than usual

General lifestyle tips

- Drink plenty of fluid. Aim to drink at least six to eight glasses (one and a half to two litres) of caffeine free, non-fizzy fluids a day. The best type of fluid to drink is water (flavoured with squashes if you prefer). Limit caffeinated drinks such as tea or coffee to three to four drinks per day. Fizzy drinks may make bloating worse.

- Eat regular meals spaced out evenly during the day if possible, including having breakfast every day.
- Try to be active each day. This can be exercise or as part of your daily tasks such as house work, gardening, walking the dog or walking with children to school.
- Take time to relax by walking, doing yoga, listening to relaxation tapes or music, or reading a book.

Should I avoid any specific foods?

There are no foods you need to avoid completely at this stage. You may find that reducing your intake of whole wheat cereals and choosing fruit and vegetables (please see pages five and six) in place of some of your usual choices may help.

Which foods should I try to include in my diet?

The following foods are good sources of fibre which help to soften the stool making them easier to pass.

Linseeds

Linseeds are available in golden, brown, whole, ground or milled form from most health food shops and supermarkets. As yet, there is no evidence to suggest that any type is better than another. Linseeds can be bought ready mixed with other seeds and dried fruit. Discuss with your dietician whether these options are suitable for you.

Do linseeds need to be prepared?

Linseeds can be taken whole but if you prefer you can crush or grind them before use. If you do this, they should be stored in the fridge and should last up to three months. Whole linseeds last much longer and can be stored in the cupboard. You do not need to soak them before use.

Note: if you have diverticular disease, it may be safer to choose ground or milled linseeds.

How many should I have?

Try starting with one tablespoon a day and increase gradually up to three tablespoons per day, as required. Try the same dose for at least one week before you decide whether you need to increase or decrease your dose. It may take the bowel a while to adjust to a different amount of fibre and the full benefits may take three to six months to be seen. If you have more than one tablespoon, you may find it helpful to have some in the morning and some in the evening.

How should I take linseeds?

Linseeds can be mixed into many foods including cereal, yoghurt, soup or salad.

Do I need to drink fluid with them?

Yes, make sure that you have at least 150ml fluid per tablespoon of linseeds taken.

Will linseed oil or capsules help?

The oil does not contain fibre so is not suitable for helping the bowels.

Oats

Oats can be included as porridge, oatcakes or flapjacks. They can also be mixed into soups, stews, sauces, yoghurt, crumble topping or used in baking biscuits or bread. You can also buy breakfast cereals or sliced bread that contain oats. Oat bran can be taken as a cereal or added to foods in the same way as oats.

Fruit and vegetables

Try to include five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. A portion is around 80g of fresh, frozen or tinned varieties. Try to swap some of your usual choices to options from the following list of fruit and vegetables as these are less likely to cause bloating whilst increasing your intake of fibre.

Fruit:

- ✓ banana
- ✓ berry fruit (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries)
- ✓ citrus fruit (eg oranges, grapefruit, pineapple)
- ✓ cranberries
- ✓ kiwi fruit
- ✓ papaya
- ✓ passion fruit
- ✓ rhubarb

Vegetables:

- ✓ aubergine
- ✓ carrots
- ✓ courgettes
- ✓ cucumber
- ✓ green beans
- ✓ olives
- ✓ parsnip
- ✓ peppers
- ✓ spinach
- ✓ sweetcorn
- ✓ potatoes with skins on

Nuts and seeds

These can be added to cereals or salads or eaten as snacks. However, avoid cashews and pistachios.

What about medication?

Your GP may prescribe a laxative which you can take alongside the dietary changes. However you may find that once you have established the changes to your diet, you no longer need to take the laxatives as often. Discuss the best options for you with your dietitian or doctor.

Some medications may worsen constipation eg iron medication or pain relievers containing codeine or morphine. If you feel that your medication is making your constipation worse, discuss with your doctor whether there is a suitable alternative that you can try.

How long should I make these changes for?

Your bowels can take time to adjust to any changes you make. Allow at least four weeks before you decide whether your symptoms have improved. If they have not improved, discuss alternative treatments with your dietician.

Useful information

The IBS Network, Unit 5, 53 Mowbray Street, Sheffield, S3 8EN.

Helpline: 0114 272 3253

Website: www.theibsnetwork.org

Core Charity: www.corecharity.org.uk

Concerns and complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. However, if you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the PALS and complaints team on freephone 0800 328 7971.

If you need the information in another language or format please ask us

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Produced by registered dietitians.

Nutrition and Dietetics is part of our Older People Directorate.