

Eating for Irritable Bowel

Question - What is the single most important principle to eating for IBS?

Answer - Organize every meal along the lines of easily tolerated, high soluble fiber staples.

French or sourdough bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, fat-free flour tortillas, baked corn chips (Tostitos), pita bread, oatmeal, soy foods, polenta, etc. must form the foundation of every meal and snack. Think of vegetables, fruit, seafood, beans, nuts, egg whites, and chicken breasts as secondary ingredients to be used in smaller quantities for flavor.

Tips, Tricks, and Helpful Hints for Eating and Cooking

- * Eat soluble fiber first whenever your stomach is empty
- * Chew thoroughly. This will help prevent you from eating too fast and swallowing air, which can cause problems.
- * Eat at a leisurely pace - if you must eat in a hurry, serve yourself half portions.
- * Eat small portions of food, and eat frequently - the emptier your stomach is, the more sensitive you will be.
- * Avoid eating large amounts of food in one sitting as this can trigger an attack
- * Avoid ice-cold foods and drinks on an empty stomach. Cold makes muscles contract, and your goal is to keep your stomach and the rest of your GI tract as calm as possible.
- * Avoid chewing gum, as it causes you to swallow excess air, which can trigger problems.

- * Drink fresh water constantly throughout the day (not ice cold). Limit the amount of water or other fluids you drink with your meals, as this can inhibit digestion.
- * Eat green salads -tiny portions, non-fat dressing-at the end of the meal, not the beginning (tell people you're French).
- * Peel, skin, chop and cook fruits and vegetables; lightly mash beans, corn, peas, and berries. Finely chop nuts, raisins and other dried fruits, and fresh herbs. Nuts in particular can be quite tolerable when finely ground. To keep dried fruit from sticking to your knife when chopping, spray the blade with cooking oil first.
- * Use only egg whites (2 whites can substitute for 1 whole egg), and try to buy organic.
- * You can almost always reduce the amount of oil called for in recipes by at least 1/3.
- * Use non-stick pans and cooking spray, as this will dramatically lessen the amount of oil you cook with. Remember, with IBS the less fat the better, period.

Think Substitution, Not Deprivation

- * Substitute soy, rice, or oat milk for all dairy milk (check the ingredients to be sure there is no oil added). Try a wide variety of brands and flavors as the difference in taste can be dramatic. Some brands are truly wretched and some are delicious. My favorite is VitaSoy lite vanilla. It's helpful to keep two types of soy/rice milk on hand: unsweetened for cooking, and vanilla for drinking.
- * Use soy or rice substitutes for cream cheese, sour cream, ice cream, and other dairy products (check the ingredients to be sure the items are low-fat).
- * Many meat-based recipes such as tacos, sloppy joes, chili, etc. can be easily adapted to IBS guidelines by substituting TVP (textured vegetable protein, a soy food available in health food stores) for the ground beef. Simply eliminate the cooking oil and season the TVP as you would the meat. When well prepared most people honestly can't taste the difference. In addition, there are many vegetarian cookbooks available that replicate traditional American homestyle

recipes with vegan substitutes for the dairy and meat ingredients. Try out several of these books from your local library and buy your favorites.

* Find a well-stocked local health food store and try a wide variety of vegan versions of deli meat, hot dogs, burgers, chicken wings, etc. There are tasty versions of just about every fast food and junk food on the market - just check the ingredients for a low fat content.

* Use only fat-free salad dressings, mayonnaise, etc.

* Substitute cocoa powder for solid chocolate.

* If you have a weakness for a particularly deadly food (mine's cheesecake), try slowly eating just one to two measured tablespoons after a satisfying meal of high soluble fiber foods. I've found this to be a pretty foolproof method for occasionally treating myself.

* Watch out for hidden fat in seemingly safe foods: biscuits, scones, pancakes, waffles, restaurant French toast, crackers, mashed potatoes, store-bought dried (usually fried) bananas.

Powders, Pills, and Potions

* Take Metamucil or Citrucel (NOT sugar-free) every day. This may be the single greatest aid you'll ever find for controlling IBS.

* Carry Fibercon capsules (soluble fiber in a pill form) with you to have on hand when you have to unexpectedly wait too long between meals, or eat at a restaurant. Take two pills with a large glass of water. Fibercon in general is not as effective as Metamucil or Citracel, but it is easier to carry in your purse or wallet and does provide some measure of protection in emergency situations.

* Peppermint is a smooth muscle relaxant, and can be very helpful in preventing/relieving IBS spasms. I consider it a wonder drug. Try drinking lots of strong, hot mint tea throughout the day. It's inexpensive to make your own with dried peppermint leaves from bulk spice counters at health food stores. You can also try peppermints such as Altoids. I swallow them whole with meals as I would a prescription anti-spasmodic pill. You may wish to try Colpermin, a brand of

enteric-coated peppermint oil capsules, which are not available in the US but can be ordered from the UK (see Directory of Resources). They're perfectly legal and do not require a prescription. The directions state to take the capsules between meals but most IBS sufferers I've received feedback from have had better luck when they take them right before eating. However, be careful if you have GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease) or suffer from heartburn as mint in any form can worsen these symptoms.

* Take a multi-vitamin, multi-mineral supplement everyday. An additional 1500 mg. of calcium daily may also help, as calcium plays a critical role in regulating muscle contractions; it also has a slight constipating effect. Women taking extra calcium may want to consider an iron supplement, as calcium can block the absorption of iron from foods and lead to anemia (take the calcium and iron supplements at different times of the day).

Be Active! But Rest When You Need To

* Try to be in motion after each meal. Go for a short, leisurely stroll around the block. Climb up and down a few flights of stairs at work. If you're at home, simply doing the dishes and cleaning up immediately after a meal should help. If you're at work, try to do things you can accomplish while standing. The point is to not become immobile on a full stomach, particularly while sitting down (and NEVER lying down). You want to be gently active.

* Try to get 30-60 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise every day. Exercising regularly will help your whole body function better.

* Daily practice of yoga, meditation, or tai chi can significantly reduce stress-related attacks

* Make sleep a priority. When you're tired your body simply cannot function properly, and this makes you more susceptible to attacks. In addition, sleep loss markedly decreases your ability to handle stress, and stress is a universal trigger. Try to take every opportunity you have to catch up on sleep by taking regular naps, setting an earlier weekday bedtime, and sleeping in on weekends.

What to Eat When You Can't Eat Anything

We've all been there. There are some days when it seems like everything you eat triggers an attack. When this happens, you need to give your body a break and stick to the safest foods possible.

- * French or sourdough bread (not whole wheat or multi-grain)
- * Toasted plain bagels
- * Toasted plain English muffins
- * Pretzels (salted or unsalted)
- * Fat-free Saltines
- * Fat-free fortune cookies
- * Plain angel food cake, homemade or from a mix
- * Arrowroot crackers
- * Cold fat-free cereal such as Corn Chex, Kix, Rice Chex, Rice Krispies, Honeycomb, or Corn Pops, eaten dry. At all costs avoid bran, granola, and whole wheat choices, as well as cereals with raisins, other dried fruits, or nuts
- * Homemade dried bananas
- * Plain cooked pasta (not egg), sprinkled with a little garlic salt
- * Lots and lots of strong hot peppermint tea