Common IBS Food and Drink Triggers

SLIDE 1

Obviously your diet can have a big impact on your IBS symptoms, but it can be hard to pinpoint exactly what is triggering them.  Looking at common triggers and keeping a food and symptom journal can be very helpful.

​SLIDE 2

​FODMAPs are carbohydrates that are not absorbed very well in the small intestine, or not absorbed at all.  They can drag water into the intestine, causing diarrhea.  When they move into the large intestine, they become dinner for your gut bacteria.  This creates gas that stretches the wall of the intestine, causing pain and other IBS symptoms.

​FODMAPs are currently all the rage in IBS treatment.  It's a huge topic and you can find out more in The FODMAP Elimination Diet section.

SLIDE 3

​Fats slow down digestion, possibly trapping gas in the gut causing pain or making constipation worse.

Bile helps you break down fat in the small intestine. If this bile is not reabsorbed properly, it can draw water into the intestine causing diarrhea and bloating.

Diarrhea and a sudden urge to run for the bathroom can also be caused by your gastrocolic reflex or GCR. This is a normal reflex triggered by eating that increases movement in the colon. A large amount of fat sends a stronger signal. If you have IBS-D you may already have an exaggerated GCR, which makes things worse.

​SLIDE 4

Caffeine is a stimulant that has a direct effect on the central nervous system and on the gut. Many studies use coffee and have shown that it increases motor activity in the colon. So for cramping and diarrhea consider cutting down your intake, but for constipation it may help to get your bowels moving.

​SLIDE 5

Alcohol is a known gut irritant. It also changes the rate at which contents empty out of your stomach.  Some research shows that it speeds up when the alcohol content is below 15% (beer or wine), which could cause diarrhea and slows down above 15% (spirits), which could lead to constipation.

​Alcohol is also a diuretic, which means that it draws water from the body and could cause constipation.

​Some alcoholic beverages contain FODMAPs, which may make your symptoms worse if you are sensitive to them.

​SLIDE 6

Carbonation in beverages can increase pressure in the gut due to excessive air intake.  This increased pressure can cause bloating and pain.

You could also try ditching the straw, as this can also add extra air to your gut.

SLIDE 7

Spicy foods are also a common gut irritant, due to a compound called capsaicin that is thought to move things through your gut more quickly. It could possibly help with constipation, but it's not such good news if you suffer from diarrhea.

​Capsaicin can also cause abdominal pain and a burning sensation when it comes into contact with a certain receptor (TRPV1) in your gut walls.  It's thought that some people with IBS may have more of these receptors in their gut lining, making them more sensitive.

​SLIDE 8

Fibre is a type of carbohydrate your body can't digest, so it passes through your digestive tract.  Fibre can help digestion, but it can also be a trigger for IBS symptoms.

There are 2 main types of fibre, soluble and insoluble.  Soluble fibre dissolves in water and can swell to form a thick, jelly-like substance in the gut.  Insoluble fibre does not dissolve in water and is what we typically think of as roughage.

​Increasing soluble fibre could be good for both diarrhea and constipation.

Insoluble fibre physically stimulates your intestines, causing things to move through more quickly.  This could be good for constipation, but for people with motility problems and an overly sensitive gut this stimulation may translate as pain.  Insoluble fibre generally increases transit time through the gut, which isn't helpful if you have diarrhea.

SLIDE 9

​Many foods containing fibre are also high in FODMAPs.  If you are sensitive to FODMAPs, increasing intake of these foods could make your symptoms worse.

​There is some evidence that a low fibre diet many work for some people with IBS, especially if symptoms are more severe.

​SLIDE 10

Sugar alcohols, also called polyols, are the “P” in FODMAPs. They are used as sugar substitutes in products like sugar free gum or they can occur naturally in foods.

​Sugar alcohols are not digested in your GI tract and can cause diarrhea, bloating and distension. Normally this would only happen if you ate large quantities.  But if you have IBS and your gut is overly sensitive, they could cause problems at a lesser amount.

SLIDE 11

Remember...

* Don’t eliminate everything all at once
* Figure out the main suspect. If you drink a lot of coffee, start there
* In IBS the amount count! A little of something might be OK, but a lot not!
* The goal is to include as many things in your diet as you can, while still managing your symptoms

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