

ADVANCED GASTROENTEROLOGY OF BERGEN COUNTY, P.A.

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Gastroenterology
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IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

Dietary Guidelines for Helping to Eradicate Bacteria Overgrowth and Prevent Its Return

Traditionally, the diet for people with IBS was one that encourages the consumption of high-fiber foods along with plenty of fluids to increase bowel motility and to relieve constipation. In addition, patients were often advised to eat five to six smaller meals during the day, instead of the normal, larger three meals that most people commonly eat. Unfortunately, both of these measures - high-fiber diets and more frequent meals - were counterproductive for most patients with IBS.

The problem with fiber is that it is comprised of carbohydrate chains that humans can't digest. The undigested fiber supplements make their way down the colon, where the bacteria ferment it, producing bloating. Therefore, I recommend a diet that contains only modest amounts of fiber found naturally in fruits and vegetables, in place of fiber supplements intended as stool-bulking agents. I think you're getting the idea: don't eat food that leaves much behind.

Eating more than three meals a day also causes problems for people with IBS. The reason for this is that the cleansing-wave mechanism that rids the small intestine of food byproducts, waste, and bacteria can only occur when you're not eating. The more meals that you have per day - and this includes snacks between meals - the less time your body has to produce appropriate cleansing waves, making it easier for the bacteria in the small intestine to maintain their colonization.

The dietary approach that I recommend to my IBS patients is to eat foods that are easily digested, so that most of the nutrients can be absorbed higher up in the intestine, away from bacteria. In this case, less "residue" is left over at the distal, or "bottom" end. Your diet should contain some fiber for bulk and proper stool formation, but not too much, and it should be primarily composed of foods that are easily absorbed.

Foods that are *not* well absorbed should be minimized or eliminated from the diet altogether, because they end up being a good fuel source for the bacteria residing near the “bottom” of the small intestine.

Adequate fluid intake throughout the day is also important. If your diet does not include enough water, it becomes more difficult for your body to have proper bowel motility. Without healthy bowel movement, the buildup of bacteria within the gastrointestinal tract becomes more likely.

Finally, as I mentioned, it is important that you limit your food intake to three meals per day, eating nothing in between. This means that you allow three to five hours between each meal, and avoid snacks and drinks (other than water) during that time, so that the small intestine’s cleansing-wave function can take place. For those patients who are most prone to bacterial overgrowth, the cleansing-wave function may not be very efficient. This is why it is particularly important that you give the small intestine a break from food for three to five hours between meals to allow the cleansing function a chance to rid the intestine of food residue and bacteria.

What follows are ten guidelines on how to eat in order to most effectively reduce and prevent bacterial overgrowth. These guidelines should also be followed after you complete the IBS protocol and have eradicated bacterial overgrowth, so that you have the best chance of minimizing its return.

1. Try to avoid the following sweeteners:

- * Corn syrup (fructose)
- * Mannitol
- * Sorbitol
- * Sucralose (Splenda)
- * Lactose
- * Lactulose

The biggest culprit is sugar-free gum, which most often contains sorbitol (a sugar that humans cannot digest). On the other hand, glucose, sucrose (table sugar), and aspartame (Equal or Nutrasweet) are acceptable. You should also limit foods and food products sweetened with fruit juice, which contains fructose. This is hard because so many food products are sweetened with fructose. Try to limit your sugar intake to no more than 40 grams per day, and ideally much less. Reading food labels can help you achieve your goal.

2. Limit or eliminate the following “high-residue” foods. These foods are difficult to digest and leave residue in the small intestine:
 - * Beans (kidney beans, garbanzo beans, pinto beans, etc.)
 - * Lentils
 - * Peas (including split-pea soup)
 - * Soy products (tofu, soymilk)
 - * Yogurt, milk, and cheese (100-percent Lactaid milk is acceptable as a milk substitute)
3. Drink eight cups of water a day. A good guideline is to drink two cups of water with each of your three meals, then one cup between breakfast and lunch, and one cup between lunch and dinner.
4. Beef, fish, poultry and eggs are acceptable foods, and are also good sources of protein. You do not need to limit these foods throughout the day. However, be sure to only eat portions that are appropriate for your body size. Most people require only about 4-8 ounces of meat products per day.
5. Potatoes, pasta, rice, bread and cereals are also acceptable. It’s all right to include some of these foods at each meal. They contain carbohydrates that are well absorbed high up in the small intestine, serving as fuel for your body, not for the bacteria. A good rule of thumb is to eat no more than a half cup to one cup of these carbohydrate foods at each meal. Believe it or not, white bread is best in this circumstance. Try to

keep multigrain breads to a minimum. If whole-grain breads are desired, oat and wheat fibers are better choices. Also avoid wild rice.

6. Fruits should be eaten in moderation - two servings per day. Fruits contain fructose, which again is difficult to digest. Choose fresh, not dried fruit. Dried fruits concentrate the fructose into a smaller package and it allows for more fructose ingestion because more is eaten.
7. Fresh, nonstarchy vegetables should also be part of your daily food intake. Cooked or lightly steamed vegetables are preferable to raw vegetables, because they are easier to digest and to absorb. Avoid large salads full of raw vegetables, as this can lead to too much residue. You can incorporate small amounts of salad, but do not eat raw vegetables exclusively as they are hard to digest. A good rule of thumb is to have three to five cups of cooked vegetables per day.
8. Dairy products are best avoided because of the lactose they contain. In addition, do not substitute with soymilk, as soy products contain nonabsorbable oligosaccharides, a class of carbohydrate that can contribute to bloating. Try almond or rice milk instead. Another great alternative is Lactaid milk, because all of the lactose is pre-digested.
9. Coffee, tea, and soda should be consumed only in moderate amounts. Out of these three types of beverages, tea is probably the most healthful choice. Coffee is also acceptable as long as you limit your intake to one or two cups per day. Sodas, on the other hand, are not a healthy choice. Non-diet sodas may contain corn syrup and other types of sugar. Diet sodas are now starting to contain sucralose (Splenda), another fuel source for bacteria. These types of soda should be avoided altogether. Diet sodas containing Nutrasweet may be consumed in moderation. When you are thirsty, however, the best option is to have pure, filtered water. Water flavored with lemon or lime juice is also a good alternative.
10. Finally, make sure you eat a balanced diet and that your meals contain sufficient calories so that you are able to maintain your body weight. In addition, incorporate moderate exercise into your weekly routine at least every other day, as regular physical activity helps to maintain regular bowel movements.