

Primärvårdens dietistenhet

Regionhälsan, Västra Götalandsregionen

2021-07-21

Dietary advice if you have IBS with diarrhea

In IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), the gastrointestinal tract is more sensitive than normal. It is therefore common to feel completely normal functions differently than what gut-healthy people do. Intestinal movements or gases and feces pressing on the intestinal wall can give discomfort, pain or cramping. If you have IBS with diarrhea, the colon moves too quickly and the stool becomes loose. You can also experience that you have to rush to the toilet, precisely because the intestine is extra sensitive.

There is no diet that can cure IBS, but by changing how, when and what you eat, your symptoms can be alleviated. Dietary treatment should be individually tailored and designed to suit you.

To feel better, reduce discomfort with food intake and to cover your energy- and nutritional needs you can try to:

Eat regularly and in moderate portions to get a more even load on the intestine. For example, eat breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as 2–3 snacks. It should not be too long between the meals so that you become very hungry and eat a lot at once. Eat your meals evenly throughout the day.

Eat in peace and quiet and take the time to chew properly, otherwise you will give your stomach and intestines unnecessarily much work to process the food. Peels, membranes, stems, seeds and nuts can be experienced as difficult to digest. Peel things that have peels and finely chop, grate or mix anything else that is difficult to digest.

Be careful with fatty foods, strong spices, coffee and alcohol. Many people with IBS experience increased discomfort from these as they stimulate bowel movements. Fat can also increase sensitivity and impair the transport of gases through the intestine.

Reduce the intake of foods high in fermentable carbohydrates. Fermentable carbohydrates are not broken down completely in the small intestine, but instead end up in the large intestine where they ferment and cause gas, abdominal swelling and discomfort/pain. Examples of foods containing fermentable carbohydrates are onions, beans, lentils, apple, watermelon, honey, wheat, lactose dairy products.

Gas and abdominal swelling

In case of problems with gas and abdominal swelling, you should take care to:

- Chew with your mouth closed
- Avoid drinking carbonated beverages
- Avoid chewing gum
- Avoid using sweeteners, mainly xylitol, sorbitol and mannitol
- Reduce the amount of fermentable carbohydrates

Fiber rich foods are not always favorable

If you have problems with diarrhea, too much fiber can worsen your symptoms. Eat a smaller amount of fiber often, rather than a larger amount now and then then. Tip:

- Finely ground fibers from grains can work better than coarsely ground grain fibers. Eat in moderation of whole grain bread, whole grain cereals, whole seeds and kernels. Crisp bread (knäckebröd) or toast may work better than soft bread.
- Cooked root vegetables and cooked vegetables are better tolerated than raw. Sometimes vegetables and root vegetables are better tolerated if chopped, grated och blended.
- Berries are usually better tolerated than most fruits

Fluid is important

Ordinary tap water is excellent to drink! In case of diarrhea, it is important that you replace the fluid lost. Remember to drink plenty of water and/or use fluid replacement.

Fluid replacement can be purchased at pharmacies and grocery stores, but you can also make your own fluid replacement at home:

Boil 1 liter of water with 2 tablespoons sugar and 0.5 teaspoon salt. Flavor with tea or 2 teaspoons fruit juice/juice concentrate per liter if needed.

Probiotics

Probiotics are bacteria that can benefit the gut. These bacteria can sometimes help to normalize an unbalanced intestinal flora and thus reduce discomfort such as gas, abdominal swelling, pain and diarrhea. There is a large variety of bacteria. If you choose to try probiotics, try one product at a time consistently for for 4 to 6 weeks and then evaluate its effect.