

Irritable Bowel Syndrome and FODMAPs

You've been diagnosed with IBS...now what?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a condition that causes abdominal pain, constipation or diarrhea, gas, and bloating. Changing some of the foods you eat may help to reduce or eliminate those GI symptoms you have been experiencing. New research has identified a dietary treatment for this condition. Although everyone is different and what triggers a response for one person may be different from another, the low FODMAPS diet does appear to be helping many people with IBS.

What are FODMAPS?

FODMAPS stands for fermentable oligo-, di-, and monosaccharides and polyols. As you can see, sticking with the term FODMAPS makes it easier for everyone! These are types of carbohydrates that are easily fermented by the bacteria in the intestine. They also include carbohydrates that are poorly absorbed in the small intestine. As result, when these foods are eaten, they can produce abdominal pain, gas, and bloating.

These carbohydrates include fructans, galactans, lactose, fructose, and sugar alcohols. Some people may tolerate one or more of these types, but others may not tolerate any. It isn't important that you remember all of these specific types, but it is important to be able to recognize the names. The good news is that lists are available to show foods with these carbohydrates. Some will even break this down by the type of FODMAP.

Foods that contain carbohydrate have a range in the amount of FODMAPS present. Some foods are high in FODMAPS. Those are limited with this dietary management of IBS. On the other hand, foods that are lower in FODMAPs are recommended in place of those high FODMAP foods.

What foods are high in FODMAPS?

- Fruits- apples, apricots, avocado, blackberries, cherries, figs, fruit juice (any), guava, mangoes, lychee, papaya, pears, peaches, persimmon, plums, prunes, watermelon
- Vegetables- artichoke, asparagus, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, leeks, okra, onions (including onion powder), shallots, snow peas, sugar snap peas
- Dairy- cheese (soft, like ricotta, cream cheese, and cottage cheese), evaporated milk, ice cream, milk (from animal sources), powdered milk, yogurt
- Grains- wheat and rye (in bread, crackers, pasta), barley
- Proteins- baked beans, black eyed peas, cashews, chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils, pistachios, soy beans, soy milk
- Sugars/Sweeteners- honey, fructose, high fructose corn syrup, isomalt, sugar alcohols (like sorbitol, xylitol, and others ending in -ol)
- Other- chicory root, inulin, fennel, garlic (including garlic powder)

Instead, choose foods that are low in FODMAPS:

- Fruits- bananas, blueberries, cantaloupe, citrus, grapes, kiwi, honeydew, passion fruit, pineapple, raspberries, strawberries
- Vegetables- bamboo shoots, bok choy, cabbage, carrot, celery, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, kale, lettuce, potatoes, green beans, pumpkin, rutabaga, spinach, squash, tomato, turnips
- Dairy- brie, butter, hard cheeses, Greek yogurt, lactose free milk, lactose free yogurt, plant based milks (almond, rice)
- Grains- oatmeal, rice, quinoa, gluten free bread and cereal (because it is free from wheat and rye), spelt
- Sugars/Sweeteners- aspartame, glucose, maple syrup, sucralose (Splenda), Stevia
- Proteins- almonds, fish, peanuts, pecans, poultry, meat, seafood, walnuts
- Other- garlic or onion infused oil, sorbet, olives, pesto, soy sauce

Why shouldn't I have fruit juice or canned fruit?

Fruit juice, even those without added sugar, provides a concentrated amount of fructose. The same for canned fruit. Fruit is usually canned using syrup or fruit juice. To avoid increasing IBS symptoms, avoid these even if the fruit is listed on the low FODMAPS list.

Do I really have to follow this diet?

Avoiding foods that are high in FODMAPs is important if you want to see improvements. Partially following the diet won't resolve the symptoms. In other words, the more closely you stick with low FODMAPs, the more likely you are to feel better. But there's good news. This diet isn't meant to be long-term. At the start you will follow this diet strictly for 6-8 weeks. After that you can start to introduce some of the high FODMAP foods. Do this 1 by 1 so you can see how you react to that food only. Once you know which foods trigger symptoms and which you can tolerate you will be able to follow a more liberalized diet long-term.

Although this diet limits gluten-containing grains, like wheat, rye and barley, you won't need to follow a strict gluten free diet. Your IBS symptoms happen from the FODMAPs in the food, not the gluten. Gluten-free foods may still contain other FODMAPs. However, purchasing gluten free foods will result in limiting wheat, rye, and barley. This may be a good choice for foods like bread and pasta.

Eating lots of low FODMAP foods at once can add up to a lot at one time, so you may find you need to limit those to ½ cup serving per meal. There's no one size fits all magic number, which is why it's important to see how these foods make you feel.

Since this diet does restrict many otherwise healthy foods, you will want to focus on getting all the nutrients you need from those low FODMAP foods. The same basic rules apply. Half your plate should be filled with colorful fruits and vegetables. A quarter of your plate should be whole grains and the other quarter should be a lean protein source. Aim for 3 servings of lactose free dairy foods, plant based milk (rice, almond, coconut, but not soy), or other calcium sources (aim for ~300 mg/serving) a day.