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Irritable Bowel Syndrome: Simple Self-Help Tips

By Sophie Lee

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by: **Sophie Lee**

If you have been diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), you will know how difficult it is to treat. Doctors can be dismissive of IBS symptoms such as diarrhea, constipation and bloating, and when treatment is offered it may only help for a short while before the distressing symptoms return.

Sufferers often find that they have to deal with the symptoms themselves, through self-help methods and supplements, rather than by using conventional medicines. However, this does not mean that there is no hope of improvement. By sharing their experiences, sufferers can learn a lot about what really helps to ease IBS.

All the self-help tips in this article have come from IBS sufferers who have found a way to control their irritable bowels. Before trying any form of self-help, please make sure that you have your doctor's approval, and do check that anything you try will not interfere with any medication you are taking.

Calcium tablets

Linda, who suffers from severe diarrhea, says: "What has helped me for more than two years is calcium carbonate, an over-the-counter supplement. I take three tablets a day, one at each meal. The most success has come from using any formula of calcium supplement that is like Caltrate 600 Plus with vitamin D and minerals. The only side effect is at the beginning of taking the calcium you may have some gas or indigestion, but this usually goes away after taking a regular dose for a few days."

If you suffer from constipation rather than diarrhea, you could try magnesium supplements instead, as these can have a slight laxative effect.

Digestive enzymes and probiotics

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Kim, who also suffers from bad diarrhea, says: "I tried taking digestive enzymes with acidophilus and found significant relief within three days. I am not afraid to eat now, but find that I still cannot eat very much refined sugar or high fibre vegetables. I have also added a cup or two per day of peppermint and chamomile tea. When I do have an episode it occurs late in the day and by the next morning I am feeling back to normal."

Looking at your diet

Laura describes how a close examination of her diet helped her IBS: "I was placed on every kind of medication, and sometimes they worked in the short term, sometimes they didn't work at all. The doctor finally suggested trying to alter my diet in cycles, and we discovered that eating meat was my problem. I became a vegetarian and no longer have constant problems. Sometimes I even go years without any pain at all. It's worth all the effort you put into it when you finally feel better."

Mina also found that dietary change helped control her symptoms, alongside traditional medication:

"I've made a number of changes to my diet. I've eliminated milk and mostly any dairy, fried foods, sugar for the most part, pop, alcohol, potato chips, spicy food, rice, pasta and bread. Most recently I'm eliminating flour. But my best friend for the last couple of years has been Imodium Quick Dissolve tablets. I don't ever leave home without them. I just have to make sure I don't overdo it. If I ever become immune to the wonder drug I am gonna be a real mess!"

Flaxseed

Watching your diet is sometimes not enough to completely control the symptoms, and natural or herbal supplements can help, as Marion discovered: "After about six months of a horrendously restrictive diet (ultra low-fat vegan with no raw veggies or fruit except banana) and a lot of Metamucil, I managed to get it sort of under control. But if I deviated from the diet, the chronic diarrhea would come back. Someone I met told me that she had helped her IBS by taking a tablespoon of freshly ground flaxseed with a glass of water or juice every morning. I thought it was another crackpot cure, but eventually I decided to try it. She had told me that pre-ground flaxseed didn't work because flax seed starts to oxidize as soon as you grind it and that whole flax seeds are no good either, because they cannot be digested properly. After years of IBS, in about two weeks it just went away. I cannot believe that I now have perfectly normal, regular bowel movements."

Fiber, water and yoga

Pam, who struggles with constipation, has developed a combination of things which work for her: "I drink Metamucil (psyllium fibre) every day and try to relax, pray or meditate, even do a little yoga. The more I make myself relax and take time to de-stress the better I can manage my problem. I know time for yourself is very hard to come by sometimes but I have to if I'm going to manage this. I try to drink at least three bottles of water a day. This is also hard sometimes but I have to take care of me the best I can. I also take a mild anti-depressant. This has helped a bunch in my stress department and in turn has helped my IBS."

Stress and IBS

Daniel believes that his symptoms are related to his emotions and stress: "I thought that when I was stuck on the toilet, experiencing the most severe cramps, thinking I was about to pass out from the pain, feeling like I was about to throw up, I was the only one. I'm still trying to work it out but I believe it has a lot to do with my psychological state. I say this because although I don't get too stressed out at any one moment, I do have general worries about money and life. I tend to find when I'm not worrying about these things I don't get the pain as much, if at all. It's easier said than done of course, I can't just stop worrying about money or my future, but being aware of these things seems to help – being optimistic and knowing that everything is only temporary. I have been taking Colpermin (peppermint capsules) as a preventative which often helps and for a while I took painkillers which I think helped."

Soluble versus insoluble fiber

Some nutritionists believe that IBS sufferers' intestines react differently to soluble and insoluble fiber, and this has been Stu's experience: "After trying all kinds of drugs and healthy eating, my pains were still there. I found by accident that it wasn't so much what I ate but whether I ate it on a full stomach or not. My failsafe is pasta on an empty stomach, I get no reaction – it is soluble fibre that settles the colon apparently. I quickly searched on the internet for recipes high in soluble fibre and I have improved. Most significantly though I am on no medication and this puts me in control of the IBS, not the other

way around. I think this is important as stress certainly can trigger the symptoms off. I don't avoid insoluble fibre as it is essential for the body, but I recommend that you eat it on a full stomach."

A final word

Lastly, please do make sure that you have been officially diagnosed with IBS and had your symptoms fully investigated before trying any self-help methods. As Joe found out, bowel symptoms can be due something other than IBS: "I was diagnosed with IBS, but I went to get a second opinion. They did an ultrasound followed by a barium follow-through which showed major inflammation and blockage of my small intestine. The final diagnosis is Crohn's disease. It's a pity they didn't catch it before I was seriously ill, instead of fobbing me off with excuses of 'It's IBS, there's no cure so live with it!'"

Sophie Lee has suffered from irritable bowel syndrome for 14 years. She runs the IBS Tales website at www.ibstales.com where you can read hundreds of personal stories and tips from IBS sufferers.

3 Ways To Life Happy And Healthy With Irritable Bowel Syndrome

By The IBS Diva

Let me ask you something. What do Tyra Banks, Camille Grammer and Cybil Sheppard all have in common? They all suffer from irritable bowel syndrome - along with about 20% of the rest of the population, according to recent studies.

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I'm the IBS Diva. And I say having irritable bowel syndrome doesn't have to be a death sentence. There are ways not only to cope but to thrive and live a happy, healthy life. Yes, I know, it can be a bit embarrassing at times - always searching for the nearest bathroom whenever you go out, getting up in the middle of movies and only eating certain foods.

The IBS Diva doesn't let that get in the way of her good time, though. And you shouldn't let get in the way of yours, either.

Here are the IBS Diva's three simple pieces of advice for coping with irritable bowel syndrome.

1. You're still fabulous, honey. Act like it. Change your mindset about this functional disorder. You're not an outcast. You're a tough, no-nonsense leader. Believe it.
2. Don't stress - just rest. Just like the IBS Diva, you need your beauty sleep. Make sure you get at least eight hours per night. Let your body rejuvenate and heal during the night. Then you can wake up fabulous like the IBS Diva.
3. Keep searching. Even the IBS Diva searches for solutions for irritable bowel syndrome. Let's face it. Having this disorder is no walk in the park. But there are ways to cope and live a happy, healthy life. Search for them while you're on your journey to self acceptance. It can only help.

Honey, you have to look at irritable bowel syndrome as a challenge that you must overcome, not as a death sentence. With the proper mind set and a willingness to try new and effective dietary changes and medical solutions, you can live a healthy and happy life with IBS.

For the rest of the Diva's no-nonsense advice on living with IBS, visit:

. And

remember, the IBS Diva says, "Stay fabulous, baby!"

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