

Title: Simply Woman & Home  
Date: 01.01.22  
Circulation: 52,000  
AVE: £830

your health

# The shock: IBS TRIGGERS you didn't know about

Worried about a flare-up? Here's some tactics to help you take back control

**While for many of us, our New Year's resolutions might include trying to get back into our favourite jeans or just generally aiming to eat healthier, for the 12 million people in the UK\* with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), embarking on a weight loss journey can be met with trepidation. That's because many sufferers live in fear of eating something that can trigger symptoms, which may include stomach cramps, bloating, diarrhoea and constipation. These can come and go and may last for days, weeks or even months. But what causes these symptoms and which foods should you avoid? Our experts have the answers...**

**Living in fear**  
Being aware of all surprising triggers of IBS – and that's not just food – is key to reducing stress for sufferers. 'If you've got IBS, this can cause a lot of anxiety,' says nutritional therapist Jeannette Hyde, author of *The 10 Hour Diet* (£8.99, Gallery UK). 'You're always worried about whether you can get to the loo in time. This can really interfere with daily life. It's not known exactly what causes IBS, but we do know that stress, certain foods and erratic eating can imbalance the gut microbiome (bacteria) and make symptoms worse.'

**Gluten-free bread**  
'Many people are sensitive to foods from the nightshade family,' says women's health expert Claire Fawcett-Darling (balance-dwellness.co.uk). 'These are a group of vegetables, fruits and herbs such as potatoes, peppers (including chilli and cayenne), tomatoes, aubergines, paprika and curry spices that contain substances called glycoalkaloids, which can lead to inflammation and aggravate IBS. So, check ingredients. For example, many gluten-free breads contain potato starch.'

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'Eating raw foods may seem like a healthy option, but not if you've got IBS,' says Claire. 'With IBS, the

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'There's a big connection between IBS and blood sugars,' says Claire. 'If you don't eat all day in anticipation of a big night out, this puts your body into a stress response. When blood sugar levels are out of balance, you produce too much of the stress hormone, cortisol. This slows digestion and leads to inflammation, which exacerbates IBS symptoms.'

**Comfort eating**  
'If you've got IBS, you're also more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression, according to studies,' says Claire. 'Eating refined carbs (eg, white bread, pasta, rice) promotes the overgrowth of unhealthy bacteria in the gut. When these break down, endotoxins (toxic substances) are released into the bloodstream, causing inflammation. This makes IBS symptoms worse and also induces inflammatory changes in the brain that can cause anxiety and depression. So, if you suffer from IBS and low mood, it's crucial to avoid refined carbs.'

**Everyday medications**  
'Certain medications can lead to IBS,' says Jeannette. 'Cough medicines, for example, that contain sorbitol, which is poorly absorbed, can lead to fermentation and unhealthy bacteria in the gut. Antibiotics also strip the gut of good bacteria. So always eat live yogurt and take probiotics while taking a course. Painkillers and antidepressants can make constipation worse, and antacid medication blocks stomach acid, leading to poor digestion and an increase in unhealthy bacteria.'

**4 WAYS TO BEAT IT**  
1 Keep a food diary – take note of any foods that cause symptoms and make you feel uncomfortable.  
2 Avoid any foods that damage your gut bacteria, such as highly processed foods, additives, sweeteners and sugars.  
3 Time your meals right. 'Only eat between 8am and 6pm, or 10am and 8pm,' says Jeannette. 'When you allow yourself a 14-hour fast at night, you digest your food much better. This also allows your gut to heal and repair.'  
4 Exercise regularly to reduce levels of the body's stress hormones, such as cortisol.

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