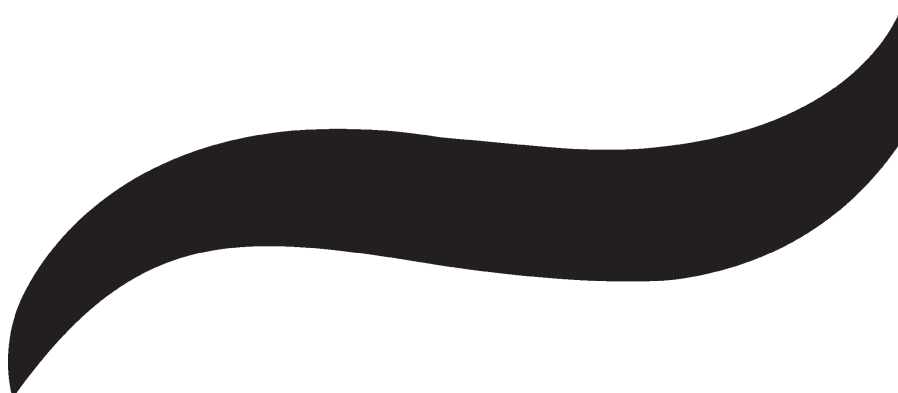




Emotional Support & Adjustment

Information for patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)
Produced by Clinical Health Psychology & ACCEPT Service



EMOTIONS AND IBS

Living with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) often comes with many different emotions. Your day-to-day life might be affected by discomfort in your gut, suddenly needing the toilet, and worry about what others might think or say. Research shows that it is common for people to feel:

- ❖ Anxious
- ❖ Stressed
- ❖ Sad
- ❖ Depressed
- ❖ Frustrated
- ❖ Angry

Everyone reacts differently and there is no 'correct' way to feel.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

The human body is designed to react to stress; you may have heard of the 'fight or flight' response. This is when you notice changes in your body, such as a racing heartbeat or faster breathing. This can happen when you are in a stressful situation. You might also notice mental changes such as not being able to think clearly or feeling a sense of worry.

The fight or flight response can be helpful in some situations. However, it can become unhelpful when the problem keeps happening over a long period of time, like when you have IBS.

You might notice that some emotions, especially stress, can make your IBS symptoms worse and cause them to flare up. If your symptoms are worse, this can also make you feel stressed and cause other emotions. This can end up creating a vicious cycle of stress and physical discomfort. There is no proof to say that IBS is caused by stress alone, but it is important to understand how stress affects your gut. This can help you to understand how to better manage your symptoms.

THE GUT AND THE BRAIN

Research shows us that the gut and the brain are able to communicate with each other and affect what the other is doing. A good example of this is feeling butterflies in your tummy when you're nervous. This communication is known as the gut-brain axis. Here are some important facts about how your gut and brain are linked:

- ❖ You have brain cells in your gut. There are so many that the gut is often called the second brain!
- ❖ Your gut bacteria is very important – 95% of your body's serotonin is made by your gut bacteria. Serotonin is a chemical that has many important jobs in your body and one of these is controlling your mood
- ❖ You have a nerve that connects your brain and your gut called the vagus nerve

If you do things that help support your gut-brain axis, this can help to calm your IBS symptoms and improve how you feel emotionally.

COPING WITH STRESS

People living with IBS often report that they feel stressed. This is often because IBS “attacks” can be serious and you don’t know when they will happen.

However, we know that finding ways to cope with stress can actually reduce your IBS symptoms. This is why looking after your mental health is an important part of looking after your IBS.

Everybody copes with stress in different ways and finding ways that work best for you might involve some trial and error. Here are some examples of things that other people with IBS have found helpful for reducing stress:

- ❖ Relaxing with a hot water bottle
- ❖ Gardening/ getting outdoors
- ❖ Reading
- ❖ Relaxation techniques such as mindfulness or meditation (deep breathing can affect your vagus nerve and calm your gut)
- ❖ Listening to music

However, the important thing is finding an activity or hobby that works for you.



SELF-CARE

Here are some other things you can do that are good for your mental health and can help you to manage your IBS:

1. **Prioritise down-time**

Make time in your day or week to do an activity you enjoy. This is really important for good mental health and for keeping stress at bay.

2. **Exercise**

Daily exercise can help IBS symptoms such as bloating, flatulence (wind), and constipation. It is also a great activity for your mind. Whether it's going for a wander around your garden or running a marathon, it is important to do little and often.

3. **Practice good sleep hygiene**

Getting quality sleep every night is important for keeping your mind and body healthy. Try to do the following:

- ❖ Going to bed and wake up at the same time every day
- ❖ Avoid caffeine (e.g. tea, coffee, cola) in the afternoon
- ❖ Do something relaxing - like reading or taking a bath before bed
- ❖ Avoid looking at screens around bedtime. This can make it harder to get a restful night's sleep.

See the sleep foundation website for more tips on good sleep hygiene <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene>

4. **Journaling**

Journaling is writing down your thoughts and feelings so you can understand them more clearly. This can improve symptoms of IBS, because it can reduce stress and help you to find out what your triggers are. Triggers might be things like stressful situations or certain foods.

5. Keep a food diary

Food diaries can help you to keep track of what foods you've been eating and how you have been feeling, allowing you to better understand your IBS symptoms and identify potential triggers.

6. Breathing exercises

Breathing exercises help your body to relax, and can help to control your nervous system, which is good for your digestion. You will find lots of information online which explain simple breathing exercises, or you can ask your nurse or GP.

7. Making simple dietary changes

See the NHS Inform website for advice on IBS and making dietary changes. <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/stomach-liver-and-gastrointestinal-tract/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs>.

Or ask your dietitian what changes you can make to help you to manage your IBS symptoms. Speak to your doctor about a referral if you have not met with a dietitian.

8. Social support

A shared burden is always lighter. Try to reach out to a friend and/or relative who you have enjoyed a close relationship with over the years. Let them know you are having a tough time and welcome their support and guidance; they may be able to help you to reduce things that make you feel stressed every day.

RESOURCES

Here are some extra resources where you can find further information and support.

Online IBS resources:

- ❖ About IBS: A website set up by the IFFGD (International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders) charity. You will find more information about IBS and support resources. <https://aboutibs.org/>
- ❖ Guts UK: The charity for the digestive system. Guts UK has a whole section on their website about IBS. <https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome/>
- ❖ The IBS Network: A charity set up to help people with IBS. It includes a self-care programme which covers the nature, causes, and management of IBS. <https://www.theibsnetwork.org/>

Online mental health resources:

- ❖ Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI): a great website with information on ways to improve your mental health and other people's. The website includes workbooks, information sheets, apps, and more for a variety of mental health concerns. <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself>
- ❖ Mind: a mental health charity. Their website is full of useful information, helplines, peer support services, and tips. <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
- ❖ Anxiety UK: This website gives you tools, information, and helplines for overcoming anxiety. They also have a page on their website all about IBS. <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/anxiety-type/irritable-bowel-syndrome/>

In Lanarkshire:

- ❖ Lanarkshire Mind Matters website: This website is run by NHS Lanarkshire Adult Psychology Services. It aims to link you to mental health information, advice and help, wherever you live in Lanarkshire. <https://www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk>
- ❖ Calm Distress: This is available on the Lanarkshire Mind Matters website. Calm Distress is an online course that you can work through yourself. It can help you to learn new coping skills for dealing with distress. <https://www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk/how-we-can-help-you/calm-distress-online-course-overview/>
- ❖ SilverCloud: This is available through the Lanarkshire Mind Matters website. SilverCloud is a collection of online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) courses that you work through yourself. It covers topics such as stress, sleep, and resilience. It will teach you ways to manage your emotions and “make space” around your problems. <https://www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk/how-we-can-help-you/silvercloud-online-therapy/>
- ❖ North Lanarkshire Health & Wellness Hub: Provide health and wellbeing activities such as walking groups, yoga, relaxation, and alternative therapies in North Lanarkshire.
- ❖ Reclaim Your Life from illness, disability pain or fatigue – Your life is more important than your illness. Would you like it back? This five-week course run by the Clinical Health Psychology and ACCEPT Service (NHS Lanarkshire) will help you reclaim your life from long-term physical symptoms. For more information please visit <https://www.lanarkshiremindmatters.scot.nhs.uk/how-we-can-help-you/reclaim-your-life/>
- ❖ Healthy Reading: All Lanarkshire Libraries now have a Healthy Reading Section. This has a wide range of mental health and wellbeing self-help leaflets, books, CDs, DVDs and web-based support.

SPIRITUAL CARE AND WELLBEING

The NHS Lanarkshire spiritual care chaplains are available to support the spiritual and religious needs of all patients and carers. They are happy to support people of all faiths or people who have no faith. They will respect the wishes and beliefs of anybody who wants help from them. Please speak to a healthcare professional for more information.

In a crisis, support is available from:

- ❖ **Samaritans** - Tel: 116 123 (UK) free to call 24 hour support or online at www.samaritans.org
- ❖ **Breathing Space** - Telephone 0800 83 85 87
Opening hours:
Weekdays: Monday - Thursday 6pm to 2am
Weekend: Friday 6pm - Monday 6am
- ❖ **Contact your GP, or ring NHS 24 by dialling 111** - medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.
- ❖ **MIND** - www.mind.org.uk

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NHS Lanarkshire General
Enquiry Line: 0300 30 30 243

NHS inform - The national health information service for Scotland.
www.nhsinform.co.uk
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