

Christmas can be Chaos for Your Gut

By Jackie Mitchell

Bloating, nausea, abdominal pain, constipation and diarrhoea. These are all common digestive problems that we all experience and usually they can be treated with 'over the counter' medicines. Some conditions might be as a result of overindulging or eating the wrong food, but with Christmas round the corner, what can we do to avoid them?

With more of us working from home, it's all too easy to eat a rushed sandwich in front of the computer, skip lunch altogether or grab a snack while preparing the kids' tea. How you eat is a major consideration, as eating too quickly and not swallowing food properly can lead to digestive problems. As Roberta Baldo, nutritional

therapist from Baldo & Mason

says "Eat slowly. This allows time for the signals from the senses to get to the brain and stimulate the production of digestive enzymes, muscular contractions and other processes necessary for digestion, before the food arrives."

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

Digestive problems often settle down by themselves, but sometimes symptoms persist that could indicate other conditions, such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). According to The IBS Network, this affects over twelve million people in the UK. Classic symptoms include abdominal pain, bloating, change in

bowel habits, diarrhoea and constipation. Alison Reid, CEO, The IBS Network, says "It is a very individual condition and symptoms will vary for each person. Other symptoms can include lethargy, nausea and backache. There is no specific cause for IBS but the most common risk factors are a gastroenteritis attack, a traumatic or upsetting event and courses of powerful antibiotics."

Self-management is the key to living well with IBS, says Alison. "Once you have a better understanding of what is happening in your body you will be able to explore what treatments work best for you. These include dietary and lifestyle changes, psychological therapies and medications – see your GP or pharmacist for advice. These may be used together or on their own depending on the possible cause and severity of the condition."

Managing general lifestyle and diet is vitally important when dealing with IBS, says Dr Simon Smale, consultant gastroenterologist and clinical director, Manchester University NHS Trust.

"Small meals eaten often rather than one big meal at the end of the day," he says. "Ensure you don't drink too much caffeine and alcohol as they can have dire effects. If the condition is primarily diarrhoea, avoid the following foods – cauliflower, sprouts (yes even at Christmas), onions, garlic, chewing gum and diet drinks. For constipation sufferers, ensure you have enough fluid and eat enough fruit and vegetables."

The festive season approaches so how can IBS sufferers ensure they can enjoy Christmas dinner and reduce the risk of an IBS flare up? The IBS Network suggests identifying your triggers (foods that lead to a flare up), choosing food and alcohol carefully, managing stress levels over Christmas and exercising.

With some careful forward planning you will really be able to enjoy Christmas mealtimes. Happy Christmas!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

www.baldoandmason.com
www.theibsnetwork.org

