

A Deeper Dive into IBS Relief



IBS Relief Now!

Session Three: Food – Can't live without it: How to live better with it

Why Do We Have to Eat

What kind of questions is, “why do we have to eat?” The reality is that answering the question is much harder than it appears. If it were simple, then the rate of IBS, reflux, sleep disturbance, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, anxiety, depression, autism, ADHD, and even addiction wouldn't be continuing to soar. If answering the question were so straightforward, then the prevalence of all sorts of autoimmune diseases would not be increasing. And, if the question was silly and obvious, then inflammatory pressures would not be the most rapidly increasing source of chronic disease in many parts of the world.



So, what is going on? How do we answer the question? Let's look at the impact of how we eat, what we eat, when we eat, and, yes, even why we eat, as we discover answers that can help to tame IBS symptoms.

Simply put, we don't have the ability to absorb sunlight and turn it into energy the ways plants do. We must eat plants or other foods, and convert them into energy through the complicated process we call digestion. Though all forms of life adopt different strategies, the common denominator of life is finding the best path for accessing solar energy. As we travel along our energy pathways, we have developed

methods to extract basic molecule-sized building blocks of amino acids and proteins, fats, and carbohydrates, and turn them into “us.” Too much, too little, or the wrong kinds of building blocks sets in motion a cascade of chemical changes in our cells that either supports strong health or opens the door to many of the faces of ill-health I listed above. To summarize, eating is the shortest path to the sun's energy on which our lives depend.

Other Reasons for Eating

Eating also serves other functions we cannot overlook. Minutes after exiting the womb, we are eating (or sucking at that point in time). Just as important, we are also being held closely to the soft, warm breast of a loving parent (at least this is the ideal early experience). So, you can see that right from the beginning, “getting nourished” is about not only about obtaining nutrients. Bonding, and social connection are just as important.

The growing study of **attachment** has shown that the strength and style of those early connections has a lasting impact on mental and physical health over the course of the rest of our lives. For those individuals who did not experience safe, loving early attachment experiences, eating certain foods and developing specific eating habits can become an unhealthy substitute for what was missing from early relationships. Emotional eating patterns arise when the foods consumed produce both chemical and psychological changes in our brains that help us feel safe, secure, content, or even emotionally numb-

enough that anxiety and distress are temporarily anesthetized. While foods can help us feel secure and loved, eating food as a substitute for love tends to wreak havoc on the physical body.

Sadly, the link between early attachment difficulties and IBS is quite strong, especially for women. Research studies have shown that nearly 40% of women with IBS have suffered some type of abuse in their early histories. Clearly, attachment matters. Eating habits, like emotional overeating or other eating disorders get woven into the specific patterns of IBS that certain IBS sufferers exhibit. Nevertheless, since IBS habits get learned they can be unlearned. The success of psychological therapies in treating IBS sufferers proves that.

Still more good news is that even for those individuals for whom their early history was a source of emotional and physical pain, the methods outlined in this program can produce positive relief and open the door to further personal growth.

Still more about eating

We eat to get access to energy. We eat because of learned habits related to feeling good, safe, or other ways food makes us feel. We eat because it can taste so good as foods stimulate our brain's pleasure center. We eat because it is a social ritual that helps us connect with others – family around the dinner table, friends, at holidays, or with a person we are dating. Eating is a social lubricant for structuring social relationships.



But, we also eat because food produces the chemical messengers that enables our physiology to run. And, the mastermind of that physiology is the world of bacteria living in our digestive tract. That inner world is called the **microbiome** and is an exciting world at the forefront of our understanding of what regulates health and many different forms of disease.

One cue that the microbiome is involved in generating IBS symptoms that is so many people who suffer with IBS experience symptoms that seem to have little obvious connection to our digestive system if we look at it through a traditional organ-based lens. In other words, why would headache, muscle ache, temperature sensitivity, chronic fatigue, back pain, memory and attention disturbances, changes in sex drive/libido, jaw pain, and sleep disturbance, all occur much more frequently in individuals with IBS than in people with other GI disorders or in the general population. When we recognize the significant role that our microbiome plays in regulating whole body health, the picture begins to become much clearer.

Our gut is home to trillions of bacteria from several dozen different bacterial strains. As gross as this sounds, we could not survive without these tiny residents. Within minutes of birth, bacteria begin to colonize our external skin and the “inner skin” of the lungs and digestive tract.



Our bacteria, when in healthy balance with one another – larger numbers of the good ones keep the ever-present bad ones in check – are responsible for breaking down foods we can't digest on our own. In the process, the bacteria get fed and, as they digest this food, they produce essential vitamins and hormones (messenger molecules) that are transported across the lining of the gut (our lumen) and into our bloodstream. From there, our inner interstate transportation system allows these vitamins and messenger molecules to rapidly arrive at their intended destinations in our various organs and their cells.

Until anything – molecules of nutrients, hormones, vitamins, or nasty bacteria – pass across our lumen and enter our body proper, it isn't really “in us” but just passing “through us.” That is why the gut's lumen is so heavily lined with immune cells. Acting like customs agents, they interview each molecule to find out where it has been, where it wants to go, and

whether it has permission to travel there. Ideally, this system works incredibly well, only allowing in any substances needed to support some aspect of our health and basic survival needs. But, when our microbiome is off, the composition of bacteria in our digestive tract can vary widely, allowing unhealthier bacteria to multiply. This can have a negative impact on the integrity and efficiency of our lumen. Consequences of this gut boundary compromise can include SIBO (small intestine bacterial overgrowth syndrome) or “leaky gut” syndrome, in which various nasties invade the body by getting past the lining despite the best efforts of our immune system’s border patrol. Once inside “us”, symptoms on the problem list described above can develop, right along with the more classic symptoms of IBS.

This view requires holistic, out-of-the-box thinking, which is the perspective taken by IBS Relief Now!

Health-restoring diets

Today’s diets have more in common with marketing fads than they do with sound health practices. The word *diet* comes from the ancient Greek word *diata*, which meant a “way of life.” Now, that is a diet worth following, because it goes so far beyond what you do or don’t put into your mouth.

When it comes to what you eat, the truth is there is no one-size-fits-all suggestion. For about 10% of IBS sufferers, adding fiber helps, while for more than 50%, it intensifies problems with bloating and gassiness. For some, elimination of gluten is life changing; for others, it makes a trivial difference or none. A low FODMAP diet (meaning foods low in *fermentable, oligo, di, mono, saccharides, and polyols*), involves reducing foods high in the number of short-chain carbohydrates, sugars like lactose, fructose, sorbitol, mannitol, etc., that are in many foods. While eliminating them can be fairly restrictive, this dietary vigilance shows promise.

The problem remains, however, that food consumption doesn’t exist in a vacuum. That is the wisdom of approaching IBS from a *diata* perspective rather than merely from an IBS *diet* perspective. Here



is an example, imagine you had someone who shopped and prepared a low FODMAP diet for you, but absolutely nothing else in your lifestyle changed. Work pressures and relationship conflicts? No change. Activity level or sleep disturbance? Unaffected. Worries, depressive concerns, or negative influences from your past? Not a single change? What do you imagine the effect of the FODMAP diet would be? I fully expect you could see a positive change. I also fully expect it would fall well short of what is needed to truly learn to manage IBS from a lifestyle change perspective.

Years ago, I taught a migraine management course. I asked the class participants what they did right after taking their migraine medicine, which they took immediately after noticing the first signs of migraine symptoms. I still remember a woman raising her hand and saying, “Well, I go right back to doing what I was doing before!” Not surprisingly, by over-focusing on only one piece of the puzzle – medicine – to the exclusion of a *diata-based* focus involving her crushing work demands and the stress load it placed on her shoulders, her migraine control remained very limited compared to others in the class.

I encourage you to continue using a wide-angle lens throughout the remainder of this program as together we identify the multiple factors you can learn to manage, each of which helps you take one more step forward toward IBS Relief Now!

To learn more about IBS, the gut microbiome, and how to restore digestive wellness, consider looking into the following resources.

Grain Brain
Mark Hyman, MD
Scribner Publishing, 2009

The UltraMind Solution
David Perlmutter, MD
Little Brown Publishers, 2013

Brain Maker
David Perlmutter, MD
Little Brown Pub., 2015

Your Brain on Food
Gary Wenk, PhD
Oxford University Press, 2010

The Microbiome Diet
Raphael Kellman, MD
Da Capo Press, 2014

FACTS – Summary of important points

- We eat for many reasons. Managing IBS successfully requires that we attend to them all.
 - Foods are our source of energy
 - Eating is linked to habits that we associated with emotional comfort, safety, and love
 - Eating is a social glue that shapes when and how we connect to others
 - Eating provides us the molecular building blocks that allow our bodies and minds to function each day
- The role of emotional eating patterns in IBS is significant. Healthy eating and improved IBS control occurs when we attend to the social attachment/connection patterns we have acquired from early life experiences all the way to our present-day social circumstances.
- Effective IBS control is linked to solid microbiome health. While no single diet works for everyone, cultivating healthy bacterial communities that live in our gut is important not only for IBS control but for overall brain and body health.
- Diet comes from the Greek word, *diata*, which means “way of living” or lifestyle. IBS control depends upon cultivating a lifestyle that involves healthy food, healthy relationships, a reasonable pace to our lives that includes mental challenge, moderate activity, regular doses of pleasure and joy, time for reflection and relaxation, and consistent, restorative sleep.

Stay Tuned: In the **Deeper Dive** connected to **Session Four**, I will be guiding you along the path that links digestive stability and emotional stability. For IBS sufferers, the links between digestion and emotion are

ACTS – What you can begin doing NOW

- Dietary factors to watch
 - Learn about the role of pre- and probiotics in cultivating a healthy and balanced microbiome.
 - Limit the processed sugars and foods in your diet (explore benefits of low FODMAP foods)
 - Modify the percentage of fresh vegetables, fruits, and poultry/fish in your diet
 - Monitor the role of alcohol (high in sugar and grains, including gluten) in your diet
- Diata-based factors to watch
 - Start your day with a breakfast that includes protein and plenty of fluids, but not over-relying on coffee
 - Allow 20 minutes to eat per meal
 - Deliberately eat more slowly, chewing more thoroughly, and direct focused attention to how your food tastes
 - Weather permitting, take a 10-15-minute slow-paced walk after dinner to support digestion and reduce stress before bed
 - Allow 3-hours after dinner and before going to sleep to fully empty the stomach.

especially strong. This makes the skills that regulate this ancient link particularly important to develop. See you soon!