



Digestive Health in Menopause

Week 1

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What's Going on with My Digestive Health?

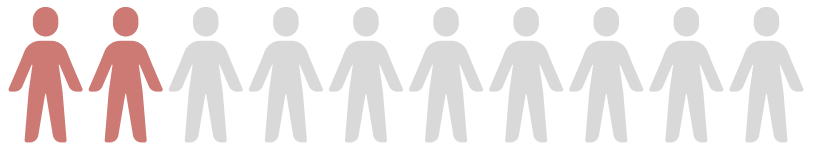
Aims

- To identify any of your potential digestive symptoms
- To understand potential triggers to your symptoms
- To learn simple dietary changes that may help symptom management

How Common Are Digestive Issues?

- 10-20% of people suffer with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
- IBS is twice as common in women than men.

1-2 in 10 people suffer with Irritable Bowel Syndrome



What is IBS?

- Chronic digestive health condition, in which there's abdominal pain or discomfort, which is often seen alongside changes in bowel habits.
- Sufferers experience multiple digestive symptoms
- IBS can be described as 'diarrhoea predominant' or 'constipation predominant'. However, some people may alternate between the two.
- There are no clearly define causes of IBS. The cause may also differ between people.
- Diagnosis of IBS usually occurs when other health conditions (such as bowel cancer) have been ruled out.
- IBS diagnosis is usually considered when the person has abdominal pain or discomfort that's improved by going to the toilet or is linked with altered bowel habits. This must also be accompanied by two of the following:
 - Altered bowel habits (straining, urgency or incomplete evacuation)
 - Abdominal bloating, distension, tension or hardness
 - Symptoms worsen by eating
 - Mucus is present

Common Digestive Symptoms

Abdominal Pain








- This is due to trapped gas.
- Urgency and bloating are commonly seen alongside abdominal pain.

Bloating

- Bloating is caused by a build up of gas, which pushes the diaphragm down to protect the internal organs. This causes the stomach to stretch and become hard.
- Bloating around your menstrual cycle is normal. However, bloating that gradually builds up throughout the day is more often an issue.

Change in Bowel Movements

- If your bowel habits have changed over the past 3 months, there might be something more going on. For example, you may have passed stools once a day but now you go three times a day.
- These are changes within your bowel habits. Everyone has unique bowel habits, so don't start comparing your own to someone else's.

Bristol stool chart	
	Type 1 Separate hard lumps, like nuts (hard to pass)
	Type 2 Sausage-shaped, but lumpy
	Type 3 Sausage-shaped, but with cracks on surface
	Type 4 Sausage or snake like, smooth and soft
	Type 5 Soft blobs with clear-cut edges (easy to pass)
	Type 6 Fluffy pieces with ragged edges, mushy
	Type 7 Watery, no solid pieces (entirely liquid)



Constipation

- Slow transit constipation: stools spend a long time in the large intestine, where lots of water is removed, making the stool hard and dry.
- Evacuation disorder: muscles involved in 'pushing' stools out have a dysfunction.

Diarrhoea

- Occurs where there's a high volume of water in the intestines.
- Diarrhoea can also be caused by bacterial infections or food poisoning.
- Spicy food, fatty fried foods, coffee and alcohol also have some research which proposes a potential link with diarrhoea.

Urgency

- This is the feeling of needing the toilet immediately - with very little warning.
- This can lead to accidents.

Mucus

- Often occurs when you have a 'sluggish' gut.
- Mucus will look like a cloudy/milky substance in the toilet.

Incomplete Evacuation

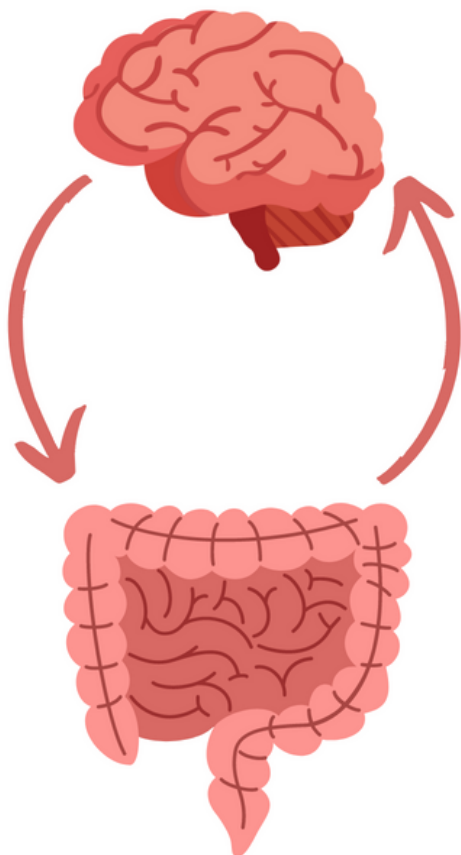
- This is the feeling of having not quite finished going to the toilet.

Flatulence

- This is a natural bodily function, but changes in frequency and smell may indicate digestive issues.
- We typically fart 5-15 times a day. Ask yourself, has the frequency of passing gas increased recently?
- Bad smells occur when the gut breaks down sulphur-containing compounds into sulphur-containing gases, which really can smell!

Red Flag Symptoms

- Anaemia - shortness of breath, heart palpitations and pale skin
- Unexplained weight loss
- Anal bleeding
- Swelling or lumps in your stomach



Causes of Digestive Symptoms

The Gut-brain Axis

- The gut and brain are connected, which is why when you feel nervous for an interview, you can often feel it in your stomach.
- When under stress, the body enters a 'fight or flight' state. The body diverts blood flow away from the digestive system which can either slow gut transit or speed it up.
- Managing stress can make major differences to digestive symptoms.

Gastroenteritis

- Infections of bad bacteria can 'throw' the balance of gut bacteria off, which can result in digestive symptoms.

Antibiotics

- Antibiotics don't discriminate when it comes to 'destroying' bacteria. This means antibiotics can remove good bacteria, which can disrupt the balance of the gut microbiota.

Abdominal Surgery

- Have you ever had surgery that left a scar? Did it ever become infected? Did you ever have to take antibiotics as a result?

Lifestyle Factors

- Diet quality, particularly your fibre intake, can influence your gut microbiota. Bacteria use dietary fibre to feed and grow. Drinking plenty of fluids is also important.
- Some individuals have dietary intolerances which may result in digestive symptoms. For example, lactose intolerance occurs due to a lack of the enzyme lactase.
- Regular exercise and movement helps to increase blood flow to the muscles in the gut. This is thought to affect the gut microbiome.



Simple Dietary Changes to Support Digestive Symptom Management

The below guidance are from NICE guidelines.

- Eat regularly and mindfully.
- Avoid leaving long gaps in-between eating.
- Drink at least 8 glasses of fluids each day. Choose water or non-caffeinated fluids.
- Restrict tea and coffee to 3 cups per day.
- Reduce intake of alcohol and fizzy drinks.
- Try limiting high-fibre foods, such as wholemeal breads, bran cereals or brown rice.
- Try reducing foods containing resistant starch, which is found in processed or re-cooked foods.
- Limit fresh fruit to 3 portions per day.
- If suffering from diarrhoea, avoid the artificial sweetener sorbitol.
- If suffering from gas and bloating, oats and linseeds (1tbsp/day) may help
- If desired to try a probiotic, do so for a minimum of 4 weeks and monitor the effect on digestive symptoms. Always follow the manufacturer's recommendations about doses.

A Note About Fibre

- Some people may find altering the amount of fibre in their diets helps symptom relief.
- This could be a decrease in fibre, but it could also be an increase.
- Working alongside a nutritionist or dietitian will help ensure you do this appropriately.
- NICE guidelines suggest if an increase in fibre is needed, that soluble fibre should be increased, rather than insoluble fibre.

Digestive Symptom Tracker

Please rate your digestive symptoms for 7 consecutive days.

Use a scale from 0-10, where 0 equals no symptoms and 10 equals severe symptoms.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Abdominal pain							
Upper digestive pain							
Bloating							
Gas							
Constipation							
Diarrhoea							
Urgency to open your bowels							
Incomplete evacuation							
Mucus in stools							
Blood in stools							
Hard difficult to pass stools							
Soft explosive stools							

Notes: