**Irritable Bowel Syndrome – PATIENT INFO LEAFLET**

**Written by GPs, dieticians and consultants in Cornwall**

IBS is a condition that affects the gut resulting in abdominal pain, bloating and a variation in the bowel habit. It often goes on for years, is worse under times of stress and can be a challenge to treat. We don’t fully understand what causes it but it’s something to do with how the gut communicates with the nervous system, the immune system and what we eat. Also severity depends on our thoughts and beliefs about it.

The NHS website has good information... search “NHS IBS” or go here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/>

Traditionally western medicine has struggled to help patients with IBS but thankfully we’re getting better. We aim to support and enable people with IBS to learn to be in control of the condition themselves so you can take your life back. We do this by teaching you

* what it is and what it isn’t
* what changes in your diet might help
* how you can change the way you think and believe about it
* what medications might help and when

Luckily in Cornwall we have solid GP, dietician, psychology and hospital specialty services to provide you with what you need IF you need them. Hopefully you can get where you need to be using online self-management resources. There are plenty of videos out there about living with IBS but remember they aren’t all written by medical specialists.

**Changing your diet** - some of the things we eat irritate the gut and might cause your symptoms and stopping eating them can improve how you feel.

Try these videos:

* <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome-ibs/ibs-diet-video-guide/>
* <https://patientwebinars.co.uk/ibs/ibs-webinars/>

If you want to see a hospital dietician to go through things... email rcht.dietletters@nhs.net and ask for a referral form or your GP can refer you

**Changing how you think** – what we think affects the IBS and the IBS affects the way we think - sometimes in a positive and sometimes in a negative way. Learning skills like acceptance, self-compassion, relaxation, mindfulness and meditation can put you back in control. We’re not able to cure it but we can teach you to live well with it. Try searching for videos of “IBS and acceptance” or “IBS and mindfulness”

* **Healthy Outlook** is a new service which covers all Cornwall and something we’ve been hoping for for a very long time. They are part of Outlook Southwest and they help people with the emotional side of coping with a challenging long term condition. IBS is one of the four conditions they see people for – your GP can refer you via this website:
* <https://www.healthy-outlook.co.uk/>

**Self management skills - The IBS network** describe themselves as the “UK’s national charity for IBS”, offering information, advice and support to patients with IBS and working with health care professionals to facilitate IBS self management” (costs £24 to join)

<http://www.theibsnetwork.org/>

**Medications** – some meds help some people. There’s only one way to find out and that is to try them. Remember they might not work and could even give side-effects though these are mild and reversible. Consider:

* pain – buscopan / colpermin / amitriptyline / SSRIs
* diarrhoea – loperamide
* constipation – fybogel / laxido
* bloating – probiotics - examples include Bifidobacteria, VSL#3 or Alflorex. You need to purchase them yourself.

**Specialists** – there are colorectal surgeons and gastroenterologists at the Royal Cornwall Hospital with expertise in cases of complex IBS but most patients should be helped with the advice above.

December 2019