

Live your Inspired Life

Low FODMAP Diet Coaching

Travelling with IBS

Travelling is on the wish list of almost every person ever asked what they want to do if they had more time or suddenly come into money. The idea of whisking away into the wild blue yonder is heaven to all but those with IBS.

IBS puts a damper on the enthusiasm as you imagine all kinds of worst-case scenarios. You start to get stressed out even before you leave the comfort of your own home. And what is the worst thing you can do if you have IBS? Stress out, of course. So, let's face the various situations one by one and put some strategies into place.

Relax

First and foremost, deal with that stress by employing those relaxation exercises you have now been doing for a few weeks. If you feel the stress coming on, go into relaxation mode immediately. Breathe in deeply and out again. Repeat.



Prepare

How to find toilets

A big concern for anyone with IBS is where to find restrooms when travelling. Here are some tips for finding the restrooms, and planning your trip so you're never without one.

- If you're taking a car trip, contact tourist boards or an auto club to find restrooms on your route.
- Learn how to ask for the restroom in the native language.
- Obtain a good map of the city you're visiting, and make a note of areas that may have public restrooms: tourist info centers, shopping malls, hotels, and restaurants.
- Carry extra tissues or wet wipes in case there is no toilet paper available (this tip is important whether you're traveling across the world or just to your local supermarket).
- Some countries have pay toilets, so be sure to have change on hand just in case.
- Be sure your travel companions are aware of your condition and ask them to scout for restrooms for you.
- If all else fails, don't be afraid to ask to use the restroom even if there is no public one available. A polite request and an explanation that you are feeling ill usually does the trick even in a shop which only has a staff toilet.

Your Body Clock

Optimally, the mechanisms in our bodies that regulate sleep, appetite, and bowel movements all function according to an internal rhythm. Travel, particularly across time zones, can throw off the body's clock, contributing to gastrointestinal distress. Make sure you get as much sleep as possible and keep your meals small and at least three hours apart just as you would at home. But don't let it go too long between meals either.

Move

Move about as much as possible, even if it is only up and down the plane aisles. In airports, don't sit down and wait, go for a good walk to get the blood pumping and your muscles and joints moving. Light exercise is essential during enforced idle times like on planes.

Drink Water

Dehydration is a very real risk of travelling, particularly on airplanes. Adequate fluid intake is crucial for good digestive health. Drink plenty of bottled water throughout your trip, especially if you are prone to constipation. Avoid all alcohol and caffeine - in addition to contributing to dehydration, they are gut irritants. Water is your friend.

Avoid Bacteria

You definitely don't want traveller's diarrhoea so take some precautions:

- Drink only bottled or boiled water.
- Avoid street vendors or other unhygienic food sources.
- Avoid raw or undercooked vegetables and fruits.
- Avoid raw or undercooked meats and seafood.

Medication

As a precaution, take medication with you for a worst case scenario – Imodium for diarrhoea or perhaps Milk of Magnesia for constipation or whatever your doctor has prescribed for these situations.



How to travel by air

1. Book your ticket several weeks to months before your trip. At the time you book, ask for an aisle seat. I would actually ask for an aisle seat close to the restroom.
2. A few weeks before your flight, ask your physician for a written prescription for your medications. That way, if medication is lost you can refill your prescription when you get to your destination.
3. Ask your physician and/or insurance company to provide you with a list of physicians at your destination that are qualified to treat your condition. This way, if you do have a problem on your trip, you have the name and number of a doctor who can treat you.
4. When packing, be sure to put all your medications, medical supplies and insurance information in your carry-on bag. This is extremely important – checked luggage does occasionally get lost or sent to the wrong destination and you will have to wait for it to be returned to you.
5. Whenever possible, keep medications in their original packaging (including supplements and vitamins). This way, security personnel will see that you have a valid prescription for your medications.
6. In your carry-on bag, pack extra undergarments, wet wipes, tissues, antibacterial hand wash, and any other items you might need in an emergency or if a restroom is not clean or stocked.
7. When you check-in at the airport, double-check your seating assignment. If you are not in an aisle seat and had requested one, ask the airline employees to move you to an aisle seat. Checking in early for your flight helps, as many seats will not be assigned until the other passengers arrive at the airport.
8. Depending on the size of the airplane, your flight may board anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes before flight time. You should know when they will start boarding the plane and plan your last bathroom break in the airport accordingly.

How to travel by air contd.

9. If the airline did not give you an aisle seat, you can always politely ask another passenger to switch with you once everyone has boarded the plane. Some passengers who often won't mind switching seats include a person who is traveling alone, a group traveling together that has been separated, or another passenger who wants the window seat.

10. Passengers are generally not allowed to get up and move about the cabin of the airplane during taxi, take-off, and landing. Ask a flight attendant what time landing may begin and plan to take your last bathroom break beforehand.

11. Also remember to pack a snack or two just in case none of the food available is suitable. If you are flying to other countries, you will need to take well packaged foods so this is one occasion when you will need to eat processed food but prepare well in advance to make sure you find processed food that is safe and doesn't have a long list of scary additives.

12. Ask your travel agent if it is possible to let the airline know about your Fodmap intolerance and what they are likely to do about preparing food for you. Because this intolerance is not yet well known, it is possible you will hit a brick wall. If that is the case, at least tell them you want a gluten-free meal. That will go some way to making the food they serve you more acceptable and then it will be luck. If you are flying with other people, make a deal with them about sharing the food. That way you could pick out the low Fodmap food from all the meals and give them the rest.



Travel by car

1. In the days before the trip, stick rigidly to the low Fodmap diet to have a very calm gut at the beginning of the trip.
2. Contact local tourist boards or an auto club to find restrooms on your route. If you do your research far enough ahead of time, you'll have time to ask the local tourist agencies to send you maps and information in the mail (many times this information is free).
3. If there are no rest stops on the highway or they are far apart, plan your route on surface streets where you are more likely to find a fast food restaurant or hotel that has a restroom.
4. If your destination is in an unfamiliar city, obtain a good map and make a note of areas that may have public restrooms. Some good places include tourist info centers, shopping malls, department stores, hotels and restaurants.
5. Make sure you have enough medication for the duration of your trip and add some extra, just in case.
6. Many public restrooms aren't clean or well-stocked. Carry a travel pack containing extra undergarments and trial sizes of toilet seat covers, wet wipes, anti-bacterial hand wash, extra toilet paper, and anything else you might need. If you need to make a dash for the toilet, you can just grab your bag and be off.
7. When possible, arrange your meal schedule around your trip. If you know that you have to use the toilet about an hour after a meal, leave enough time between your last meal and the start of the trip for that bathroom break.
8. Ensure that your traveling companions know that when you say you need to stop and find a restroom you mean NOW. They can also help you scout for restrooms and help explain if you need to jump to the front of the line.

Travel by car contd

9. Travelling by car means you can transport plenty of food. Make sure you stay in accommodation that includes a small kitchenette so you can prepare a lot of your own food and pack a lunch and snacks.

10. If you eat in restaurants during the trip, use the same strategies you would use for eating at a restaurant at home. Make sure you have your “Foods I can’t Eat” card with you for the wait staff to show the chef. If you are travelling in a foreign country, you may need to make up cards in the foreign language. It will be a bit of a challenge getting the message across otherwise. If you think it would be easier, make up a card with the meal you want, eg: steak with no sauce or marinade, steamed carrots, zucchini and potatoes or chips, salad with only oil and vinegar dressing. Remember that a breadcrumb coating won’t contain enough fructans to be a problem unless you are also gluten-intolerant. Have a glass of dry wine and enjoy your meal.



Travel by Ship

1. On the guest reservation form, you can fill out what dietary needs you have. Write down Low Fodmap diet and see what happens. Perhaps they will contact you and ask for an explanation or they will do their homework by Googling it.
2. If you are able, take your own snacks in case you get hungry but there is so much food available on board that there is bound to be a good selection you can eat. Simple grilled foods and steamed vegetables are always acceptable. At any buffet meal, ask what is in each dish and in an a la carte situation, hand over your laminated card for the chef and get some advice. Make your needs known clearly and in a voice that offers no alternative. On a ship, the staff should be trained to understand the common food intolerances but this may not include low Fodmap malabsorption, so go prepared.
3. Go easy on the wonderful cocktails that are available. Many of them will be high Fodmap so investigate the ingredients closely to see which you can have. And then only have one.
4. Book your day excursions carefully and check where you will be eating on those excursions. If the food is included, you may need to check what that food consists of. This could be troublesome so perhaps it is better to go on excursions on which you can choose where to eat, either before or after.
5. Make sure you have your medication and your emergency pack of toilet paper, wet wipes and change of clothes with you when you disembark for the excursions. Carry your laminated card with you in the language of that country.

