

Five steps to tame your IBS

for mindbodygreen

by Kim Hanson

My GP told me I had **IBS*** a disease that has no cure. His diagnosis sent me spinning - I felt alone, disconsolate and confused. My tummy troubles were omnipresent, I had countless daily headaches and I was prone to anxiety and panic attacks. Most days, I felt miserable both physically and about myself in general.

Nausea and a general feeling of dis-ease prevailed. Digestion and bowel issues alone can be overwhelming, but considering “your gut is your second brain” IBS can be crippling to one’s mental health. For me, depressive thoughts meant no energy, no inspiration, no motivation and most importantly, no joy. I needed help!

1.

Find an extraordinary naturopathic doctor...one who listens intently to your health concerns

Dr. Angela Kirk, ND insisted that although IBS may not be cured it could certainly be treated and healed. Her words shone like a ray of hope. She proposed a cleanse – a restrictive, sugarless diet to bust the candida that had taken up residence in my gut. I was skeptical that I could stick to that type of regime...after all, I was the person that never turned down desert! But, I wanted a normal life more than I wanted sugar, so after several long months bust the candida we did. I felt so much better and thought that I was in the clear. Dr. Kirk had other thoughts.

After a few weeks of false euphoria, symptoms returned. I was never quite certain in what condition I would awake in the morning.

2.

Be patient, kind and loving with yourself through any food transitions. It’s often discouraging but never give up the fight.

Next came an **ALCAT**** test. Seems I was sensitive to so many foods it was hard to keep track of them all - everyday foods and even vegetables like carrots and butternut squash. What the...? I had to stop eating wheat and dairy. Navigating a menu in a restaurant became an adventure in not eating so cooking at home was my salvation. I learned what foods my body embraced and what foods were rejected. I found brown rice bread and quinoa spaghetti which, believe it or not is delicious. I ate organic chicken and turkey, grass-fed beef, some vegetables and fruits and white rice. Lots of white rice.

Things were better for me. No coffee, no black tea, no alcohol. I was taking supplements: vitamin D, a multi-vitamin, omega 3's, cal/mag, homeopathic drops (Unda) for gut support and super-strength probiotics, but I still had days of woe. My friends could not believe the food struggles I was going through and wanted to know why, and how and what I managed to actually *eat*.

3.

IBS can manifest itself differently in each body. Explore your options, do your research and read, read, read.

An online report suggested IBS sufferers refrain from eating white rice. My staple? Another report recommended ceasing to drink all teas, not just the black caffeinated type. Processing that bit of information was demoralizing, I was at my wit's end. Herbal tea had become my drink of choice when meeting friends or after yoga or while grocery shopping. It wasn't just a hot drink I thought I tolerated but had become linked to pleasant social outings.

4.

Be open to and embrace new avenues of eating.

After feeling sorry for myself and sulking for a few days, I eliminated white rice and herbal teas from my diet. Instantly, digestion was better. It was like my body was telling me, "you are almost home". Brown rice has become my best friend and I've settled for drinking bottled water instead of herbal teas.

Going forward, Dr. Kirk's advice for me was to eat foods from the low fodmap*** diet. Although my heart and mind both rebelled at the thought of yet another new eating regime, I knew I had to try it and fell in line.

5.

Stress, inflammation and IBS can go hand-in-hand. Take an honest look at reducing everyday stress.

Unwittingly I had been reducing my stress for years by practicing yoga. Believe it or not, I had no idea of its mental health benefits. I loved the movement and the flow and the way it made me feel. Meditation naturally follows, as it is an integral part of each and every class that I attend. I'm addicted to the sweet feelings of contentment, peace and well-being that yoga brings to my soul.

Today, I feel as good as I have ever felt. My headaches are gone, my anxiety and panic attacks are gone. My stomach actually feels normal and functions well. I know the journey for me in healing my IBS is not yet over. As a human being, I have moments of weakness when I eat chocolate or ice cream knowing full well the end result is four days of misery. I am thankful for the IBS which has taught me so very much about myself. I am strong, resilient and adaptable. My level of gratitude for my body, my health and my life is sky high. Hope for the future is my reward for persevering down a rocky road to recovery.

***Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common disorder that affects the large intestine (colon). Irritable bowel syndrome commonly causes cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, gas, diarrhea and constipation. IBS is a chronic condition that you will need to manage long term.**

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome/basics/definition/con-20024578>

****ALCAT test or antigen leukocyte antibody test, is one that claims to measure adverse reactions to dietary substances. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ALCAT_test**

*****Fodmap diet**

<https://stanfordhealthcare.org/content/dam/SHC/for-patients-component/programs-services/clinical-nutrition-services/docs/pdf-lowfodmapdiet.pdf>