

IS SIBO BUGGING YOU?



Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth causes big trouble

by Jan McBarron, MD, ND

Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) is just what it sounds like: a condition that results in an overabundance of bacteria in the small intestine. And, while having plenty of bacteria in your intestinal tract is essential to healthy digestion, having an excess of the wrong bacteria in your small intestine can cause serious issues with your gut.

More prevalent than previously understood, the severity of SIBO symptoms can vary from mild digestive complaints like indigestion, gas, and stomach pains to chronic diarrhea, weight loss, and nutrient malabsorption. For many people, symptoms can mimic an irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) experience. In fact, more than a third of IBS patients test positive for SIBO. That's not surprising since SIBO doesn't typically occur on its own. Rather, it results from an

underlying condition such as type 1 diabetes, celiac disease, IBS, Crohn's disease, or a recent abdominal surgery.

Most often, your doctor will prescribe a round of antibiotics, such as rifaximin or metronidazole, to treat SIBO. It makes sense: antibiotics are highly effective at reducing the number of bacteria in your gut. However,

these drugs don't just kill the bad bacteria.

Antibiotics also wipe out the good microbes responsible for keeping you healthy. Fortunately, there are a few changes you can make to naturally support a balanced microbiome and get you back on track toward belly bliss.

HEALTHY HABITS

Your diet, though not a direct cause of SIBO, has a huge impact on your microbial makeup. If your meals primarily consist of carbs from sugar, dairy, beans, and grains, you could be making your symptoms worse. Because these foods are more resistant to digestion, they can linger in your small intestine and fuel the growth of unwanted bacteria. Consider an elimination diet, like a low-FODMAP diet, to help identify foods you are sensitive to or those triggering symptoms. Cutting out triggers can reduce symptoms such as abdominal pain, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, and flatulence.

Exercise can have positive benefits on SIBO symptoms as well. Physical activity alters the makeup and function of your gut microbiota. Plus, regular exercise can improve bowel function, reduce constipation, and ease bloating while also soothing stress, fatigue, depression, and anxiety.

BERBERINE

Used for centuries, berberine is an alkaloid compound that modulates gut microbiota. Found in botanicals, including Indian barberry, goldenseal, and Oregon grape, it's effective at treating SIBO symptoms because it bolsters intestinal immunity while alleviating systemic inflammation. Berberine also helps regulate glucose levels, enabling carbohydrates to break down so they don't fuel harmful bacteria. One study reported that an herbal therapy containing berberine was at least as effective as the prescription antibiotic rifaximin. Unfortunately, it can be difficult for the body to absorb berberine, with very little of the active compound actually reaching your bloodstream. To get the most benefit, look for a supplement that combines berberine with a proprietary plant-based material called GammaSorb that binds to nutrients, making it much more bioavailable and easily absorbed.

PROBIOTICS

Probiotics are beneficial bacteria that support digestion and increase nutrient absorption. If you've been diagnosed with SIBO, that's exactly what your gut needs. Probiotic supplementation has been shown to relieve common symptoms, such as abdominal pain, bloating, and flatulence. They're so effective, Argentinian researchers report that probiotics worked better than the antibiotic metronidazole in patients suffering chronic abdominal distension and SIBO. And if you must take a round of antibiotics, replenishing your gut with probiotics afterward can help quickly restore bacterial balance in your small intestine. ■



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advocates a comprehensive approach to health that encompasses both traditional medicine, including prescribing drugs and surgery, and naturopathy. She enjoyed over 30 years in private practice while cohosting the nationally syndicated health talk radio broadcast Duke & The Doctor. Dr. McBarron is also an author, philanthropist, educator, and the recipient of multiple awards.