

If you do suffer with intestinal gas then limit the intake of the following foods:

- cabbage
- apples
- grapes, raisins

and, replace with other fibre rich foods.

Increase your fluid intake

When you increase the amount of fibre you eat, it is important to drink more fluids. This is a very important point, which shall be illustrated by:

The “Weetabix• Story!”

Imagine eating Weetabix• and leaving your bowl unwashed overnight. The following morning the Weetabix• has dried solid to the bowl. The easiest way to remove this is by soaking the bowl in water. The same principles apply to your bowels. Unless you drink at least 8-10 glasses of water per day, the increased fibre intake may “cake” in the bowels and worsen constipation. It is also important that caffeine related drinks such as tea and coffee are not suitable fluids as they can dehydrate you and similarly make matters worse. Therefore, drink plenty of water so that you pass clear urine and not straw coloured or dark urine. The latter are signs of dehydration.

How long will this take?

Bowel related pain could take as long as 3-6 months to settle following a change of dietary habits. Be patient! But remember healthy eating is a life-long habit and will only do you life-long good.

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Chronic Pelvic Pain and Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Pelvic Pain is a common and debilitating condition. In General Practice pelvic pain is seen as often as asthma and chronic backache. Up to 20% of all visits to a Gynaecologist are for pelvic pain.

What are the Causes of Chronic Pelvic Pain (CPP)?

- Endometriosis
- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Pelvic adhesions

However ... the most common and frequently under diagnosed condition is Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) or otherwise commonly known as constipation.

What is IBS?

It is the commonest bowel disorder affecting 10% of the population. The disease affects 3 times as many women than men, and is more likely to affect women aged between 15 - 45. Although IBS can be a chronic problem, it is a benign disorder, and does not progress to, or increase the risk of any other disease. It can be associated with endometriosis. It is not life threatening.

What are the Symptoms of IBS?

Symptoms and severity of symptoms will vary greatly from person to person:

- Lower abdominal pain - continuous or colicky
- Bloating which can be worse towards the end of the day
- Diarrhoea or constipation although bowel motions may be normal
- Mucous in the stool
- a feeling of incomplete emptying of the bowel
- a dull throbbing ache lasting for a few hours / day after intercourse
- you may have pain in the shaded areas shown in the diagram
- you may be able to feel tender lumps in these shaded areas.



Why was I referred to a Gynaecologist?

IBS and pelvic problems can present with similar features and it can be difficult to distinguish between them. In fact, between 10 - 60% of referrals for CPP may be due to IBS.

- The lower abdominal pain in IBS can be confused with pelvic pain.
- There may be pain on sexual intercourse with both IBS and CPP.
- IBS symptoms may become worse, and more common, just before a period, causing confusion as to what the problem is.
- Bloating is a common problem.

What causes IBS?

Physiological, emotional, behavioural factors and some medicines:

- If there is a disorder in the muscle of the bowel.
- The bowel can become hypersensitive and the muscles can go into spasm, causing pain.
- Certain foods may be found to trigger an attack.
- Stressful life events are reported by up to 60% of IBS patients, which can exacerbate symptoms.
- Codeine and opiate based painkillers that you may be taking for CPP.

The Treatment of IBS

Drug therapy is not usually recommended for the routine treatment of IBS. In women with IBS, although they may present with chronic pelvic pain, they do not require surgery, which may be appropriate for other causes of CPP.

Dietary Changes

Increase your dietary fibre intake but it is as important to increase your fluid intake too (see later).

Why?

This can relieve some of the problems associated with IBS. Increased fibre can hasten gut transit, increase stool bulk and allow for easier bowel motions.

How?

- Eat at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables each day.
- Replace white bread with whole grain breads and cereals. Eat brown rice instead of white rice.
- Eat a bran cereal for breakfast.

Warning Start Slowly!

When fibre is added to the diet many people notice bloating, cramping, or gas. Making small changes in your diet over a period of time can help prevent this.