

Aromatherapy and Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

What is IBS?

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is the name given to a longstanding illness consisting of frequent abdominal discomfort and bowel symptoms that cannot be explained by any other disease, according to the IBS Network. The main symptoms include:

- abdominal cramps
- bloating
- diarrhoea
- constipation

What causes IBS?

IBS is a common condition affecting the digestive system and is usually a lifelong problem. The exact cause is unknown – it has been linked to things like food passing through the gut too quickly or too slowly, oversensitive nerves in the gut, stress, and a family history of IBS. It is more common in women than men (3:2), tends to start in teenage years or twenties and may persist on and off throughout life. You have more chance of having IBS if a parent or sibling has it.

IBS can also cause:

- indigestion
- headaches
- backache
- tiredness
- nausea
- flatulence
- passing mucus
- frequent urination
- incontinence
- anxiety
- depression

There are days when symptoms are better but flare-ups can be triggered by food or drink. It can be very frustrating to live with and can have a big impact on everyday life.

The most common risk factors are:

- an attack of gastroenteritis
- a traumatic or upsetting event
- a course of powerful antibiotics

These factors can stimulate the immune system in the gut, inducing mild inflammation, increasing sensitivity & depleting healthy colonic bacteria. As symptoms can be similar to other more serious conditions, if they last for longer than a month, there is a family history of disease or there is a sudden onset after age 50, medical tests for Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, bowel or ovarian cancer should be carried out.

IBS can be managed by diet and lifestyle. Relaxation and exercise are beneficial as is eating regularly, avoiding fatty, processed, spicy foods and too much caffeine. Keeping a food diary may help to identify triggers. Herbs and probiotics can also form part of the management plan.

How aromatherapy helps for IBS?

The role of the aromatherapist is to support the person rather than try to cure the condition. A combination of topical applications via massage blends, ointments, creams and gels may be used together with inhalation. In cases of IBS aromatherapy may be used for physical relaxation, emotional support and as a support to the digestive system. Oils used may vary according to phases of the condition. Care should be taken that none of the oils used are contraindicated or liable to aggravate the condition in any individual case. If in any doubt please refer to a GP.

Useful essential oils:

- basil *ocimum basilicum*
- black pepper *piper nigrum*
- chamomile *anthemis nobilis*
- cardomon *elettaria cardomomum*
- coriander *coriandrum sativum*
- geranium *pelargonium graveolens*
- ginger *zingiber officinale*
- lavender *lavandula angustifolia*
- neroli *citrus aurantium var. amara*
- peppermint *mentha piperata*
- rose *rosa damascena/centifolia*
- spearmint *mentha spicata*
- sweet fennel *foeniculum vulgare var. dulce*
- sweet marjoram *origanum majorana*



Always contact a qualified Aromatherapist who will guide you on the oils that are suitable for your individual needs.

Reference:

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

<https://www.theibsnetwork.org>

The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy by Salvatore Battaglia

Complete Essential Oils by Julia Lawless

The Art of Aromatherapy by Robert Tisserand

375 Essential Oils & Hydrolats by Jeanne Rose

Natural Solutions to IBS by Marilyn Glenville

To find a practitioner to discuss your needs [click here](#)