

FODMAPs – A simple solution for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)



In a previous post I spoke about small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) as one of the main causes of IBS. I briefly mentioned that one of the main treatments which brings relief to 90% of IBS sufferers is to follow a low FODMAP diet. So what is a FODMAP?

It's a bit of a mouthful but FODMAP stands for fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and ployols. Essentially, it is an indigestible sugar that ferments in the gut and provides fast food for bowel bacteria, allowing them to produce excessive amounts of gas.

Two of the biggest culprits within these categories are fructose (a monosaccharide mostly in fruits) and lactose (a disaccharide mostly found in dairy food). Two foods which seem to be the most problematic for people with FODMAP issues are (unfortunately) onion and garlic and these should always be eliminated when attempting a low FODMAP diet.



The important thing is the amount of bacterial gas produced, and the way our bowel does or does not cope with it. This is what produces the common symptoms of IBS, namely abdominal pain and discomfort, bloating, flatulence and diarrhoea or constipation. Generally your system can cope with a little of your problematic food, or a little of a few foods from within your problematic FODMAP category. However, once a certain threshold of the FODMAP sugars is reached, that is when symptoms are triggered. This is why it can be so difficult to work out which foods are problematic for you because sometimes you can eat them with no problems and other times you can't.

The great news is that once you work out which foods or FODMAP categories are a problem for you, cutting them out of your diet temporarily seems to greatly alleviate, if not completely resolve the symptoms for around 90% of IBS sufferers. The even better news is that after only 1-3 weeks most people can begin to reintroduce their problem foods and usually find that after having given their system that short break, they no longer experience the same issues from eating that food.

Monash University has developed an app you can purchase for around \$10 which contains information, recipes and a traffic light system for hundreds of foods, products and condiments. It lets you know which category any particular food falls into so you can soon work out if you have an issue with just one of the FODMAP categories or several. It has the ability to create shopping lists, personal notes on particular foods, and has a 7 day trial you can follow to assess your body's response to a low FODMAP diet.

Balm Naturopathy can assist you with working out which foods may be causing you a problem. Or, if you believe you have already tried eliminating FODMAP foods and are still experiencing symptoms, Balm can help explore alternative causes and devise a treatment plan to address those causes and bring you welcome relief.