

Stomach the Pain!

Most of us are no stranger to the occasional upset stomach, but what if this happens day after day, or even year after year? Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is no laughing matter, but there are ways to manage and alleviate symptoms.

According to leading colorectal surgeon **Dr Quah Hak Mien**, the reasons for people developing IBS are still unclear. "It can develop after an episode of upset stomach or food poisoning, which is why some doctors believe that the bowel infection or subsequent use of antibiotics may have disrupted the balance of the intestinal bacteria ecosystem."

Dr Quah advises maintaining a good balanced diet and avoiding caffeine. "Have sufficient fruit and vegetables in the diet, but not too much as this may make bloating and gas worse," he

says. Regular exercise and sleep will help reduce stress and may improve symptoms.

"Also, take probiotics such as lactobacillus, the beneficial bacteria found in fresh yoghurt or cultured milk drinks."

The symptoms of IBS are similar to colon cancer or inflammatory bowel disease such as Crohn's or ulcerative colitis, and to rule these more serious conditions out, **Dr Quah** recommends a colonoscopy.

"The goal of medical treatment is to relieve symptoms, to educate the patient to understand their condition and facilitate their participation in managing their condition. The important thing to understand is that IBS, however bothersome and disabling, does not lead to a serious disease such as cancer. Symptoms can often be improved and relieved through treatment."



The Lowdown on IBS

- Continuous upset stomach for months or years
- Each attack may be triggered by stress or a variety of food
- Common symptoms include bloating, abdominal cramps, excessive gas, diarrhoea or constipation
- Often affects women more than men
- Tends to start in the teenage years or early adulthood. **1**

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