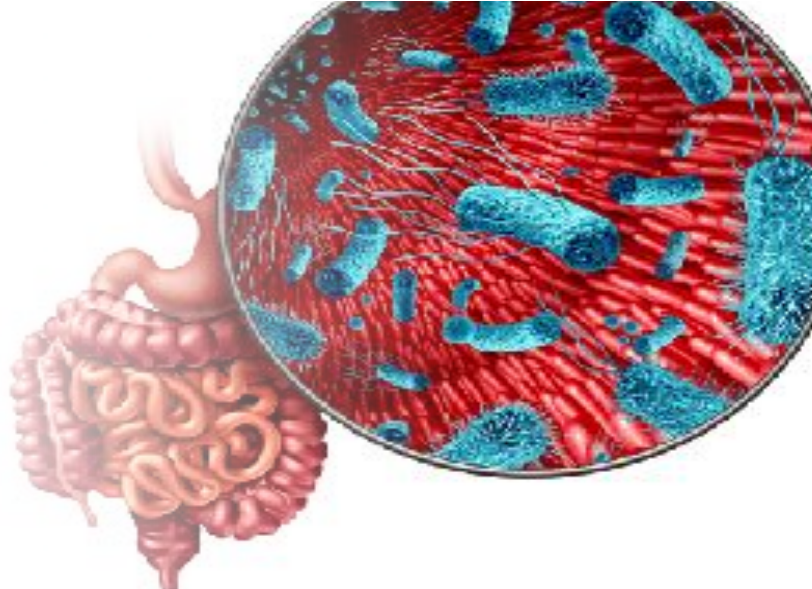


Essential Guide to *SIBO*

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Getting to the Root of Digestive Distress...could it be SIBO?

Digestive complaints are common and can significantly impact quality of life. As naturopathic doctors, restoring gut health is at the core of so much we do. When people come to us with digestive complaints, many have been told they have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), without any investigation into what is irritating the bowel. A deeper

investigation into the cause of digestive distress can guide us to the right protocol for each individual. One of the increasingly recognized contributors to digestive distress is a condition called SIBO. In fact, many doctors believe SIBO may be the root of most cases of IBS.

What is SIBO?

SIBO stands for small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, meaning there are excessive numbers of bacteria in the small intestine, where they should not be present. These bacteria act on prebiotic foods in your diet (foods like onions, garlic, beans, asparagus, and apples), producing hydrogen and/or methane gas that gives rise to uncomfortable symptoms, most commonly:

- bloating and gas
- indigestion and reflux
- abdominal pain, pressure and cramping
- diarrhea or constipation

In SIBO, the bacteria in the small intestine ferment dietary carbohydrates, producing excessive gas. Most people with SIBO will experience abdominal distention and bloating, but three distinct patterns of SIBO have been identified:

1. SIBO-D Diarrhea is often present, due to hydrogen gas-producing bacteria. This is characterized by loose unpredictable stools with painful gas and bloating.
2. SIBO-C Methane gas-producing microbes are present, causing constipation. In this case, the methane-producing microbes slow down bowel transit time, leading to constipation and a feeling of small, incomplete evacuation.
3. SIBO-HS In this case, hydrogen sulfide producing bacteria make foul gas with a “rotten egg” odor, from the sulfur that is present in the bowel. This is a less-common form of SIBO and cannot be detected in a breath test. However, the GIMAP microbiology test can detect bacteria that produce hydrogen sulfide. In the case of SIBO-HS, we also track and assess symptoms to determine treatment success.

Nutrient malabsorption can often occur with SIBO. In addition, a wide range of non-digestive symptoms can be related to underlying SIBO, due to the circulation of inflammatory compounds from the gut. These include fatigue, brain fog, skin conditions such as rosacea, headaches, joint pain, interstitial cystitis, restless legs syndrome, and other diverse conditions you may not associate with gut problems.

How is SIBO Identified?

If SIBO is suspected, we can test in two ways: a SIBO breath test, or a comprehensive stool microbiology test called the GI-MAP. These tests are available through our office and give us a clear picture of what needs to be treated.

Another approach is to do a trial low-FODMAP diet: if symptom relief occurs within a few days and recurs upon reintroduction of restricted foods, SIBO is likely.

Common Underlying Factors

1

Altered gut motility

Many conditions can impair gut motility along the digestive tract. Antibiotic use, an episode of food poisoning, and even periods of prolonged stress can damage the Migrating Motor Complex, a nerve response in the gut responsible for gut motility. Some other common causes of poor motility include hypothyroidism, diabetes, stealth infections (such as varicella-zoster, Epstein-Barr virus, and Lyme disease), scleroderma, use of opioid painkillers, or long-standing use of motility-suppressing drugs.

Strictures and other scarred areas of the gut where the passage of digestive contents is impeded can cause physical barriers to motility. These can arise from chronic inflammation (such as in Crohn's disease), past infections, or surgeries. Aerobic exercise and SIBO-specific abdominal massage can be helpful to manage these underlying problems. When such issues can't be fully resolved, their presence can mean longer-term use of SIBO medicines, like prokinetics or herbal antimicrobials are required.

Altered antimicrobial digestive secretions

Normal digestive secretions play a major role in controlling bacterial populations in the gut. Stomach acid dramatically reduces the number of bacteria that can enter from the mouth and reach the intestines. Long-term use of acid suppressant medications or conditions that impair gastric acid secretion promote bacterial overgrowth in the small intestine.

Another important digestive secretion that has antimicrobial activity is bile, which is excreted from the liver and stored in the gallbladder to be released after eating. Gallstones, which inhibit bile secretion, can interfere with this mechanism of bacterial control.

2

Altered immune function

3

Your immune system is critical for keeping the levels of bacteria in your gut in check. An important immune molecule produced in your gut and used to control bacteria is secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA). Low sIgA can allow those microbes to grow out of control. Supporting a healthy gut lining using specific nutrients like glutamine, Vitamin A and zinc can support healthy levels of sIgA levels.

How do We Treat SIBO?

A low FODMAPs diet is commonly used for relief of SIBO symptoms. FODMAPs is an acronym, short for fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides, and polyols. These compounds, found in many fruits and vegetables, are those wonderful probiotic fibers we eat to support a healthy gut microbiome. If you're constantly wondering why many healthy foods make you feel worse, it could be SIBO! It should be noted that while a low FODMAPs diet can be initially helpful, it is not forever. We want SIBO patients to be able to eat a wide range of healthy foods after their SIBO treatment is complete.

Another dietary treatment option is an elemental diet. This is a specially designed meal replacement that can be used for up to two-to-three weeks, under medical approval and supervision. It is a challenging diet to complete, but it is effective for treating SIBO. Don't do this diet on your own, however. Ask your ND for guidance in using the elemental diet.

Although diet is a key treatment in SIBO, it is not meant to be a long-term strategy. It is necessary to look for the original underlying causes of SIBO – what caused the SIBO to occur in the first place? – to restore a balanced gut environment that doesn't continually promote overgrowth.

What About Supplements for SIBO?

In addition to diet, antimicrobial herbal supplements help reduce excessive bacterial overgrowth. In studies, specific combinations of herbal extracts were shown to be as effective as antibiotics in addressing SIBO.

Supplements are also used to promote better digestive motility. Motility is a key concept in SIBO: in fact, bacterial overgrowth is often initially caused by slowing of the normal movement of the digestive tract that helps to keep bacterial populations in balance. Supplements that promote better gut motility are called "prokinetics", and include ginger, artichoke, and magnesium.

Need Help?

SIBO is a complex condition.

Navigating testing, diagnosis, diet and treatment requires an expert guide.

We are here to help. Providers at the Marsden Centre are trained to assess and treat for SIBO

Book a discovery call now to see how we can help



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