

How to Support A Loved One Through IBS Recovery

Practical strategies to help loved ones navigate the challenges of IBS and foster a supportive environment for healing.

Your Role Matters

Research shows in IBS...

More support → Less stress → Less pain and symptoms¹

A 2026 study of nearly 400,000 people, those who felt both lonely and isolated were **60% more likely to develop IBS.**²



Social support is an important part of IBS recovery.

Sources: 1. Lackner et. al, 2010; 2. Zhou et al., 2026

Ways to Support

1

Minimize stigma

Believe their experience, and help alleviate any shame about their symptoms. 1 in 7 individuals worldwide struggle with IBS so let them know they are not alone.

2

Decrease isolation

IBS can be isolating. People may feel embarrassed to talk about it, and avoid going out or seeing people. As much as you can, support and encourage your loved one to stay connected.

3

Foster a warm, trusting relationship

The more your loved one feels safe in their relationship with you, the more their gut is able to settle.

Your support can make a difference.



Avoid Saying:

“It can’t be that bad.”

IBS can be incredibly challenging. Questioning or minimizing their suffering can make them feel alone and less likely to reach out for the support they need.

“It’s all in your head” or “Just relax!”

IBS is a challenging and real condition with real pain and symptoms. Although the brain plays a key role in symptoms, these types of statements can feel blaming and minimizing. Someone’s IBS is never their fault and it’s not just about relaxing more. Recognize that it can take time and courage to unlearn the patterns driving symptoms.

“Oh no, that’s horrible! What did you eat?”

This is a natural response but can contribute to anxiety and food fear, which can fuel the symptoms themselves. Instead, stay calm and focus on reducing fear — about food, symptoms, and in general.

Instead Say:

“It’s going to be OK. I’m here for you.”

What someone in the midst of an IBS flare needs more than anything is safety and reassurance. Helping them feel less scared isn’t just about coping better, it’s about actually helping the symptoms settle.

“This is hard. What’s one thing that would help you feel comforted right now”

When things are hard, acknowledge it, and focus on ways to help them feel comforted. This could look like encouraging them to do a guided meditation, using messages of safety, watching a feel-good TV show, or doing their favorite hobby.

“Remember how you left the house twice last week? You are making progress.”

It can be hard to recognize the progress that is happening when in the ups and downs of recovery. Keep helping them recognize and celebrate the wins, no matter how small. Wins don’t always look like symptom improvements, especially in the beginning. It often looks like challenging fear and avoidance first.