



Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth (SIBO)

Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) is a condition where there are too many bacteria in the small intestine, which is the part of your gut that helps digest food and absorb nutrients. Normally, the small intestine has fewer bacteria than the large intestine. When too many bacteria grow in the small intestine, it can cause symptoms like bloating, gas, stomach pain, diarrhea, and sometimes weight loss or trouble absorbing nutrients.

Diagnosis:

Doctors may suspect SIBO if you have symptoms and certain risk factors, such as a history of abdominal surgery, problems with gut movement, or certain medical conditions. The most accurate test is taking a sample from the small intestine, but this is rarely done because it is invasive and expensive. More commonly, doctors use breath tests, where you drink a sugar solution (usually glucose or lactulose) and then blow into a special bag to measure gases produced by bacteria. These tests are easier but not perfect, and sometimes your doctor may decide to treat you based on your symptoms and risk factors without testing.

Treatment:

The main treatment for SIBO is a course of antibiotics to reduce the extra bacteria. Rifaximin is a commonly used antibiotic because it works in the gut and is not absorbed into the body, but other antibiotics like amoxicillin, ciprofloxacin, or metronidazole may also be used. The usual treatment lasts 1–2 weeks. Sometimes, if symptoms come back, another course of antibiotics may be needed. Your doctor may also recommend treating any underlying problems that led to SIBO, correcting any vitamin or nutrient deficiencies, and making changes to your diet. Some people may benefit from probiotics, dietary changes, or medications that help the gut move food along, but more research is needed on these options.

What to expect:

Most people feel better after treatment, but SIBO can come back, especially if the underlying cause is still present. It is important to follow up with your doctor if symptoms return or if you have ongoing problems with nutrition or weight loss. With the right treatment and follow-up, most people can manage SIBO and improve their quality of life.

References

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