

YIN SHI

DIGESTIVE

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Chinese dietetics protocol sheet

An irritable gut is not a capricious one: it is a dialogue that has broken down between the Liver, the Spleen and the intestines. Seven possible patterns, seven ways to reconnect the thread. Spotting yours is already half the relief.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

Irritable bowel syndrome affects around 10% of the population: abdominal pain, bloating, disturbed transit, all without any visible lesion on investigation. In Chinese medicine this is not a disease of the intestine but a dysregulation of the digestive orchestra: a Liver that seizes up under stress and jostles the Spleen, a Spleen that tires and transforms poorly, heat or dampness congesting the large intestine, or on the contrary fluids that are missing to keep the bolus moving. The same western diagnosis covers opposite terrains: urgent morning diarrhoea does not call for the same plate as the small dry pellets of a sedentary life. The classic mistake is applying a single diet (no this, no that) to every gut: this sheet details the seven patterns so you can aim accurately, and it leans on recent FODMAP data, the best documented nutritional protocol for IBS.

SUGGESTIVE SIGNS

- Abdominal pain or cramps, relieved or not by passing stool
- Bloating, abdominal swelling over the course of the day
- Disturbed transit: diarrhoea (IBS-D), constipation (IBS-C) or alternation (IBS-M)
- Abnormal stools: loose, mucous, hard or small pellet-like
- Frequent link with stress, meals, or periods of fatigue
- No sign of lesion on medical investigation

TONGUE & PULSE

Varies with the pattern: wiry pulse and almost normal tongue in Liver stagnation; pale tongue marked by teeth with a weak pulse in Spleen deficiency; greasy yellow coating and slippery-rapid pulse in damp-heat; dry, barely coated tongue in fluid deficiency; deep, slow pulse in Yang deficiency.

FAVOURABLE TERRAIN

The underlying terrain is almost always a gut that has become hypersensitive: a Spleen working at half speed for years, a Liver reacting to every emotion, leftovers of fullness (dampness, food stagnation) that congest in waves. IBS comes in flare-ups and remissions: this sheet helps spot the dominant pattern of the moment and adjust the plate accordingly, without rigidity.

THE TCM DIFFERENTIAL

Which pattern applies?

IBS is not one pattern but a crossroads: seven terrains can produce the same western diagnosis. The most discriminating sign is the relationship to stress: if flare-ups follow emotions, think Liver-Spleen; if they follow meals, think Spleen or stagnation; if they follow cold, think Yang. The nature of the stools then settles the rest.

TCM PATTERN	DISTINCTIVE SIGNS	TONGUE & PULSE	QUICK SIGNAL
Liver Qi stagnation invading the Spleen, the stressed gut	Alternating diarrhoea and constipation, cramps before meetings or conflicts, sighing, rib-side tension, bloating that rises and falls with mood	Tongue almost normal or slightly red at the edges, wiry pulse	***Flare-ups timed to emotions***
Spleen Qi deficiency, the tired spleen	Chronic loose stools, fatigue after eating, discreet but constant bloating, appetite without enthusiasm, pale complexion	Pale tongue marked by teeth, thin white coating, weak, soft pulse	***Fatigue + permanently loose stools***
Spleen Yang deficiency, the extinguished stove	Loose stools, dull pain relieved by heat, digestive chilliness, clear worsening with raw food and cold, clear urination	Pale, damp tongue, sometimes bluish, deep, weak, slow pulse	***Heat relieves, cold triggers***
Kidney Yang deficiency, the dawn diarrhoea	Reflex morning diarrhoea on getting out of bed (the so-called 'fifth-watch' diarrhoea), cold painful lower back, marked chilliness, deep fatigue, long-standing exhaustion	Pale, swollen tongue, deep, weak pulse, especially at the Kidney position (chi)	***Rushing to the toilet on waking + cold kidneys***
Damp-Heat in the Large Intestine, the burning crisis	Urgent, burning, foul or mucous stools, irritated anus, thirst without much desire to drink, sensation of hot heaviness, worsening with fatty or spicy meals	Red tongue with greasy yellow coating, slippery, rapid pulse	***Urgency + burning + odour***
Large Intestine fluid deficiency, the intestinal desert	Constipation with hard, dry, pellet-like stools, dry skin and mouth, straining, worsening during overwork or after fever	Dry tongue, little or no coating, thin pulse	***Dry pellet stools + thirst***
Food stagnation in the Stomach, the meal that stays	Heaviness and bloating after meals, food-smelling belching, heavy breath, irregular transit after excess, thick coating	Thick white or yellowish coating, slippery pulse	***Bloating that follows the meal + burping***

In consultation, patterns combine: the Liver stagnation + Spleen deficiency pair is the most frequent (Wood blocks Earth as it wears out), often in tension with episodes of Damp-Heat or superimposed food stagnation. Two less frequent patterns are still worth knowing: Cold-Damp invading the Large Intestine (sudden watery diarrhoea after cold or eating raw, folded here into Yang deficiency) and Blood stasis of the Large Intestine (fixed side pain, long-standing, often post-surgical or post-inflammatory: it calls for medical advice). Look for the dominant pattern of the moment, not a definitive label: IBS moves, the plate follows.

DIETARY PLANS

One plan per pattern

1 Liver Qi stagnation invading the Spleen, the stressed gut · *Gan Qi Yu Jie / Gan Pi Bu He (肝气郁结 / 肝脾不和)*

This is the emblematic IBS pattern: stress and held-back emotions freeze the Liver Qi, which 'invades' the Spleen and disorganises transit. Pain and bloating rise and fall with mood; diarrhoea alternates with constipation. The Academy uses it as the textbook case: 'the Liver and the Spleen no longer harmonise.' Strategy: relax the Liver with aromatics that move Qi, gently support the Spleen, and work the emotional terrain as much as the plate.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Fennel bulb	Neutral	Sweet, Pungent	Relaxes Stomach-Intestine Qi, calms gut spasms	*The vegetable for the clenched gut: braised, in soup, or the seed chewed after a meal. The gentlest of carminatives.*
Mint	Cool	Pungent	Disperses stagnant Liver Qi, relaxes intestinal spasm	*Herbal tea after tense meals. Enteric-coated peppermint oil capsules hold the strongest clinical trial corpus for IBS (2022 meta-analysis).*
Cardamom	Warm	Pungent	Moves Qi, transforms Dampness, awakens the Spleen	*Two or three crushed pods in rice or infusion: the spice that restarts the gut without heating it.*
Basil (Aromatic)	Warm	Sweet, Pungent	Releases the diaphragm, brings down stuck Qi	*The leaf of tension: chopped at the end, it relaxes meals eaten in agitation.*
Coriander (aromatic herb)	Warm	Pungent	Opens stagnant Qi, harmonises the centre	*Fresh herb at the end of cooking: the gesture that aerates a heavy dish and a tight state of mind.*
Dill (seed)	Warm	Pungent	Unties Qi, soothes colic	*The North's anti-colic seed: infused for 10 minutes, or in fish dishes and gentle soups.*
Kumquat	Warm	Sweet, Acrid	Smooths Liver Qi, regulates the centre	*The little citrus eaten whole: two or three after a meal when the gut knots up.*
Vervain	Cool	Bitter	Unties tensions, calms inner agitation	*The evening tea of frazzled days: it works the upper part of the pattern, the emotion that triggers the crisis.*
Chamomile	Cool	Sweet	Soothes spasm and irritation, relaxs the mind	*Infusion covered for 8 minutes: the gentle antispasmodic, ally of the nervous gut.*
Daikon : Chinese Radish	Warm	Pungent, Sweet	Brings stagnant Qi down, clears the centre	*Daikon cooked in soup: the vegetable that 'pulls Qi downward' when everything stays stuck above.*
Orange Blossom	Neutral	Sweet, Pungent, Slightly bitter	Harmonises Qi, eases tension	*A few drops in cooking water or herbal tea: the scent that loosens the solar plexus.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Coffee	Warm	Speeds up transit and stirs already agitated Qi: in this pattern, every cup can repeat the crisis. The coffee-IBS association is documented in cohorts.
Meals eaten standing up or in a rush	Variable	Eating tense is eating with the Liver on siege: the pattern's first measure is to sit down and slow down.
Raw onion, garlic and shallot	Warm	Their pungency opens Qi, but their fructans (the most fermentable FODMAPs) inflate the gut we are trying to relax: keep to condiment doses, well cooked.

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Sodas and fizzy drinks	Variable	Swallowed gas + sugar or polyol sweeteners: the mechanical bloating that imitates the crisis and feeds it.

GOLDEN RULE

Relax the Liver before filling the Spleen: a gut that lives at the pace of emotions is cooked with mobile aromatics, never with restrictions that make it clench further.

MODERN NUTRITION

Enteric-coated peppermint oil is the best documented antispasmodic remedy for IBS: the 2022 meta-analysis (Alimentary Pharmacology & Therapeutics) confirms its effect on pain and overall spasm. Coffee is associated with increased symptom prevalence (Frontiers in Nutrition, 2021). Finally, the overall Western dietary profile (fats, sugars, ultra-processed foods) is associated with IBS in the French NutriNet-Santé cohort (American Journal of Gastroenterology, 2018): Chinese Liver-Spleen theory has said for two thousand years that the gut hates haste and tension.

2 Spleen Qi deficiency, the tired spleen · *Pi Qi Xu (脾气虚)*

An exhausted Spleen no longer transforms: stools stay loose, the gut swells gently, energy drains away. This is the underlying IBS-D, the one that has lasted for years and that restrictions worsen: every food removed further weakens the capacity to transform. Strategy: nourish the centre with gently cooked sweet grains, astringe sparingly, and resist the temptation to cut everything out.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Rice	Neutral	Sweet	Tonifies the centre gently, base of the regulating congee	*The morning rice porridge is the fragile gut's first 'medicine': long cooking, plenty of water, grain that melts.*
Glutinous rice	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies Spleen Qi, warms the centre	*In sweet porridge or savoury congee: more nourishing than ordinary rice, in small regular portions.*
Yam	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Tonifies Spleen-Lung and astringes essence, consolidates transit	*The queen tuber of Spleen deficiency: 'tonifies the Spleen and Lung, astringes essence' (Bencao Bei Yao, 1683). Steamed, in soup or congee.*
Job's Tears	Cool	Sweet	Strengthens the Spleen while draining Dampness, frees the intestine	*The Qianjin Yaofang (652): 'benefits the intestines and stomach, dissipates oedema.' In congee with ginger to temper its coolness.*
Millet	Cool	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes the Spleen and Stomach, brings Qi down	*The convalescence grain of digestive recovery: evening porridge, yellow and creamy, when the gut refuses everything.*
Carrot	Neutral	Sweet	Strengthens the Spleen, gently regulates transit	*Well cooked: the tender carrot of soups and broths, friend of the fragile gut since forever.*
Pumpkin	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies the centre, nourishes the Spleen gently	*Creamy soups and purées: the orange sweetness that nourishes without tiring, all cold season.*
Chicken	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies Qi and the centre, restores appetite	*Chicken broth is the most civilised tonic there is: simmered long, it nourishes the Spleen without congesting it.*
Trout	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies the Spleen, nourishes lightly	*Mild fish in foil or steamed: the protein that does not defy digestion.*
Quince	Warm	Sour, Sweet	Astringes the intestine, regulates loose stools	*The classic astringent fruit: cooked as compote or jelly, it gently tightens transit that has gone slack.*
Beef tripe	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies Spleen-Stomach by terrain affinity	*'Like nourishes like': simmered with mild aromatics, it is the rustic remedy for worn-out stomachs.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Large amounts of raw vegetables	Cold	Raw food demands a transformation effort an exhausted Spleen no longer has: salad is the first 'healthy food' to suspend during reconstruction.
Cold dairy	Cool	Cold and damp, they congest the centre: if tolerated, prefer matured cheeses in small doses and yoghurts at room temperature.
Excess raw fruit	Cold	Three apples and a smoothie are a load the Spleen cannot transform: prefer compotes and cooked fruit while things improve.
Excess hard fibre	Variable	Wheat bran, raw wholegrains: insoluble fibre 'scratches' an already fragile intestine. Soluble fibres, on the other hand, help.

GOLDEN RULE

Put the ember back before asking for work: gently cooked sweet grains, gentle heat, regularity. The gut rebuilds like a fire: in small regular loads, never in excess.

MODERN NUTRITION

Staudacher's trial (Gastroenterology, 2017) showed that an effective low-FODMAP diet also reduces beneficial bifidobacteria: over-restriction impoverishes the microbiota, exactly as Spleen deficiency impoverishes the terrain. The same trial shows a multi-strain probiotic restores this population. Long-term follow-up (Neurogastroenterology & Motility, 2022) confirms: a personalised FODMAP diet durably improves symptoms while preserving bifidobacteria: FODMAP is a phase, not a life, and personalisation comes first. That is the modern argument for sweet grains rather than lists of forbidden foods.

3 Spleen Yang deficiency, the extinguished stove · *Pi Yang Xu (脾阳虚)*

When the Spleen's fire goes out, raw food no longer cooks: loose stools, dull pain that a hot water bottle relieves, marked digestive chilliness. This is the IBS-D of the person who is always cold, worsened by every salad. Strategy: warm the centre with warm spices and long cooking, banish raw and cold until the ember returns.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Cinnamon	Hot	Pungent, Sweet	Warms the centre, relights transformation	*A pinch in compote, rice or broth: the gentle spark of the stove that restarts.*
Dried Ginger	Warm	Pungent	Warms Spleen-Stomach, stops cold diarrhoea	*Dried is hotter than fresh: a slice in the morning broth, the ember that climbs back up the gut.*
Caraway	Warm	Pungent, Sweet	Warms the centre, moves digestive Qi	*The spice of Northern kitchens where they know the gut needs heat: bread, soup, braised vegetables.*
Caraway (seed)	Warm	Pungent	Warms and moves, dissipates cold bloating	*The seed that digests heaviness: a few crushed on root vegetables and stews.*
Nutmeg	Warm	Pungent, Sweet	Warms the centre and astringes cold diarrhoea	*A grating in purée or gentle béchamel: the spice that both warms and tightens, a rare combination.*
Cardamom	Warm	Pungent	Warms without burning, awakens the Spleen	*Green or black: the pod that restarts the stove gently.*
Pumpkin	Warm	Sweet	Nourishes the centre with gentle heat	*Soup, purée, risotto: the sweetness that feeds the chilly gut without assaulting it.*
Yam	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Tonifies the Spleen, astringes essence	*Steamed or in porridge: the tuber that supports the Spleen without cooling it.*
Chicken	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies Qi and warms the centre	*Broth, stew, boiled chicken: the meat of repair for the chilly gut.*
Mutton & lamb	Hot	Sweet	Strongly warms the centre, nourishes Yang	*The gentle Sunday stew: when the gut craves deep heat, in modest portions.*
Eel	Neutral	Sweet, Salty	Tonifies Yang and the centre, compensates exhaustion	*The tonic fish of the ancients, in broth or braised: rich and restorative.*
Millet	Cool	Sweet, Salty	Nourishes the Spleen, brings Qi down	*Compensated by warm spices: evening porridge with cinnamon and ginger.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Raw vegetables and salads	Cold	Every raw leaf asks for a fire that is no longer there: during reconstruction, everything goes through the pot.
Ice cream and iced drinks	Cold	Cold directly on the extinguished stove: water is drunk warm or at room temperature, never straight from the fridge.
Raw fruit and cold juices	Cold	The banana and the iced orange juice sabotage the Yang's rise: compotes and poached fruit for now.
Cold dairy	Cool	Yoghurt straight from the fridge doubles the problem: dairy at room temperature and in small doses, or none at all during a crisis.

GOLDEN RULE

Warm before nourishing: the pot is the first medicine, warm spices the matches. Cold is the enemy, warm regularity the ally.

MODERN NUTRITION

Soluble fibres are the 'sweet grains' of modern nutrition: psyllium beat wheat bran in Bijkerk's trial (BMJ, 2009), bran worsening symptoms in one IBS-D patient in four. The official recommendation of the American College of Gastroenterology (American Journal of Gastroenterology, 2021) says the same: soluble, not insoluble fibre: start with cooking that makes fibres available without imposing them all at once.

4 Kidney Yang deficiency, the dawn diarrhoea · *Shen Yang Xu (肾阳虚)*

When the fire of the Gate of Destiny wears out, the Spleen no longer receives the heat that makes it work: diarrhoea becomes a morning reflex on getting out of bed, the ancients' 'fifth-watch diarrhoea'. Cold lower back, deep fatigue, an ageing or exhausted terrain. Strategy: nourish the root, deep warm flavours, hot breakfasts, patience.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Prawn	Warm	Sweet, Salty	Tonifies Kidney Yang, warms the root	*In small amounts, sautéed or in soup: the crustacean that feeds the deep fire without congesting it.*
Mutton & lamb	Hot	Sweet	Warms the root's Yang, nourishes the depths	*The morning mutton broth of cold-climate kitchens: for when dawn diarrhoea settles in.*
Chestnut	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies Kidney and Spleen, astringes	*Purée, soup or candied: the autumn fruit that consolidates the bottom of the fire.*
Cinnamon	Hot	Pungent, Sweet	Warms the Gate of Destiny, supports Yang	*The ancients' gui hui warms the Kidney: in the morning porridge, it works the root.*
Fenugreek	Warm	Sweet	Tonifies Yang, chases internal cold	*Fenugreek seeds in infusion or cooking: the gentle tonic for the tired root.*
Nutmeg	Warm	Pungent, Sweet	Warms the centre and astringes dawn diarrhoea	*The spice that both tightens and warms: the grating that acts as the dietary 'Four Spirits Pill'.*
Yam	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Tonifies Spleen and Kidney, consolidates essence	*The double-action tuber: it holds the Spleen and nourishes the root at once.*
Black Sesame	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes root Yin while lubricating the intestine	*Ground into porridge: the seed that supports the depths without freezing transit.*
Walnut	Neutral	Sweet	Tonifies the Kidney, nourishes and lubricates	*Two or three walnuts a day: the dried fruit that feeds the root through sweetness.*
Sardine	Neutral, Warm	Sweet	Tonifies the centre, nourishes in depth	*The whole little fish: grilled or in gentle escabeche, it nourishes Yang without burying it.*
Dried Ginger	Warm	Pungent	Warms the lower furnace, stops cold diarrhoea	*In the waking broth: the slice that preheats the gut before the day begins.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Any raw or cold food	Cold	The root of the fire is too weak to transform raw food: everything is cooked, everything is hot, until further notice.
Cold breakfast	Cold	Dawn diarrhoea feeds on the morning's first cold shock: hot porridge is the pattern's first prescription.
Raw fruit in winter	Cold	The January morning apple tugs on the already short root: warm compotes until spring returns.
Excess salt and ultra-salted products	Variable	Excess salt weighs on Kidney function; the root prefers sweet, warm flavours.

GOLDEN RULE

Nourish the root rather than hold back the bark: the Kidney's fire relights the Spleen's. Hot breakfast, deep flavours, regularity: dawn diarrhoea resolves at the base, not with astringents.

MODERN NUTRITION

Soluble fibres work in this pattern too: the Lancet Gastroenterology meta-analysis (2020) ranks soluble fibre and antispasmodics among the effective IBS interventions, in first-line non-drug treatment. The decisive dietary gesture remains warm, regular hydration: a hot breakfast is a dietary prescription as much as a comfort.

5 Damp-Heat in the Large Intestine, the burning crisis · *Da Chang Shi Re (大肠湿热)*

This is the IBS-D of the crisis: urgent, burning, foul stools, often after years of fat, spices and rushed meals. Heat burns, Dampness glues: the intestine rejects in urgency what it can no longer sort. Strategy: clear Heat with fresh, bitter vegetables, drain Dampness with draining flavours, and remove the fuels (fried fat, chilli, excess).

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Purslane	Cold	Sour	Clears Heat, calms hot dysentery	*The ancients' dysentery plant: the Yanglao Fengqin Shu (11th c.) assigns it to the 'elderly with red-and-white dysentery and undigested grains'. In soup or blanched.*
Buckwheat	Cold	Sweet	Clears Damp-Heat, brings Qi down	*The kasha of cool winds: the grain that cools the digestive furnace without weakening it.*
Eggplant, Aubergine	Cold	Sweet	Clears Heat, drains downward	*Steamed or gently braised: the vegetable that absorbs the furnace's heat.*
Asparagus	Cold	Sweet, Bitter	Clears Damp-Heat, supports transit	*Gently cooked: the spring vegetable that washes the conduit.*
Tea	Cool	Sweet, Bitter	Clears Heat, mildly astringes	*Light green tea between meals: the bitterness that clears without assaulting the terrain.*
Rhubarb	Cool	Sour, Sweet	Clears Heat, drains downward	*In compote with ginger: cooked rhubarb brings down the bubbling heat.*
Chinese Cabbage (Napa)	Warm	Sweet	Nourishes lightly, gently clears	*The cabbage of gentleness: stewed, it restores the conduit without worsening the pattern.*
Wild celery : ache des marais	Cool	Sweet, Bitter	Clears Heat, drains Dampness	*The traditional celery in clear soups: the gentle bitterness that ventilates the furnace.*
Bamboo (Shoots)	Cold	Sweet, Bitter	Clears Heat, slides Dampness	*In soup: the vegetable that cools the congested conduit.*
Pumpkin	Warm	Sweet	Nourishes the centre while gently clearing	*In warm velouté: the sweetness that repairs the irritated intestine without cooling it.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Fried and fatty grilled foods	Hot	Heated, charred fat is the first fuel of Damp-Heat: the frying pan is suspended for the duration of the crisis.
Hot chilli and burning spices	Hot	Capsaicin adds fire to an already burning conduit: excess heat delays resolution.
Onion and garlic	Warm	Fermentable fructans + pungency: double assault on the inflamed furnace. Spring onion greens offer the scent without the FODMAP.
Sweets and pastries	Variable	Sugar ferments into damp heat: simple desserts wait until the crisis ends.

GOLDEN RULE

Clear first, rebuild afterwards: a burning intestine is not fed, it is discharged. Fresh vegetables, gentle cooking, removal of fuels: the crisis asks for a lower flame, not a purge.

MODERN NUTRITION

The low-FODMAP diet is the best ranked dietary intervention for IBS: the Gut network meta-analysis (2022) places it at the top of dietary approaches for overall symptoms. The European meta-analysis (European Journal of Nutrition, 2021) confirms significant overall symptom improvement. The signal matches Damp-Heat: fermentable carbohydrates feed fermentation, gas and drawn-in water, that is, the crisis. The Western diet rich in fat and sugar is itself associated with IBS in the NutriNet cohort (American Journal of Gastroenterology, 2018): the modern cause of the ancients' damp heat.

6 Large Intestine fluid deficiency, the intestinal desert · *Da Chang Jin Ye Bu Zu (大肠津液不足)*

This is the IBS-C of the desert: hard pellet stools, painful straining, dryness reaching skin and mouth. Fluids are missing to keep the bolus moving: neither Spleen nor intestines have what is needed to moisten transit. Strategy: nourish fluids with oily seeds, mucilages and ripe fruit, hydrate continuously, and banish the rough fibres that worsen dryness.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Black Sesame	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes Yin, lubricates the Large Intestine	*The Qianjin Yaofang: 'benefits the large intestine'. Freshly ground into porridge or compote, it is the ancients' gentle lubricant.*
Kiwi	Cold	Sweet, Sour	Nourishes fluids, activates transit	*Two green kiwis a day: the best tested fruit for constipation (AJG, 2023), taken in the morning.*
Almond (seed)	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes Yin, lubricates transit	*A dozen soaked or almond butter: the oily seed that moistens the conduit.*
Chia Seeds	Cool	Sweet	Mucilage that moistens and gently swells the bolus	*Soaked overnight as pudding: the gelled fibre that imitates intestinal mucilage.*
Papaya	Neutral	Sweet	Nourishes fluids, digests gently	*The ripe morning fruit: its papain helps transformation and its flesh moistens.*
Asparagus	Cold	Sweet, Bitter	Nourishes fluids, supports sliding	*Gently cooked: the vegetable that hydrates the conduit in depth.*
Rhubarb	Cool	Sour, Sweet	Slides the bolus, gently clears	*In compote: cooked rhubarb is the gentle laxative of Northern kitchens.*
Apricot	Hot	Sweet, Sour	Nourishes fluids, lubricates	*Ripe or dried apricot in small doses: the fruit that moistens the conduit gently.*
Sesame oil	Cold	Sweet	Lubricates the intestinal conduit	*A drizzle at the end of cooking: the fat that lets things slide, the Chinese kitchen's gesture for dry constipation.*
Banana	Cold	Sweet	Nourishes fluids, gently lubricates	*The ripe banana, not the green one: ripe it moistens the conduit, green it tightens it.*
Feta	Cool	Sweet, Sour, Salty	Nourishes Yin, moistens the conduit	*The matured cheese that nourishes lightly: small dose in a warm salad of cooked vegetables.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Wheat bran and raw insoluble fibre	Variable	Bijkerk's trial (BMJ, 2009) is clear: bran worsens symptoms, psyllium relieves them. On an intestinal desert, rough fibre dries further: prefer mucilages.
Dehydrating foods	Variable	Strong coffee, very tannic tea, excess sodium: each pumps the fluids the conduit already lacks.
Excess white rice and refined starches	Variable	Refined starch absorbs water and hardens the dry bolus: softer grains and hydration.
Ignoring the urge to pass stool	Variable	Every urge postponed lets the intestine reabsorb the bolus's water: the morning reflex is cultivated, not waited for.

GOLDEN RULE

Nourish the river before pushing the boat: oily seeds, mucilages, ripe fruit, continuous water. Dry constipation resolves through moistening, not through rough fibres that worsen the desert.

MODERN NUTRITION

Two green kiwis a day improved constipation and abdominal comfort in a controlled international trial (American Journal of Gastroenterology, 2023). Soluble fibre wins where insoluble fails: Bijkerk (BMJ, 2009) showed psyllium superior to bran and placebo, and the meta-analysis (European Journal of Gastroenterology & Hepatology, 2015) confirms that solubility, not fibre quantity, makes the difference. Probiotics improve overall IBS symptoms (Gastroenterology meta-analysis, 2023). The rule matches Yin: moisten before stimulating.

7 Food stagnation in the Stomach, the meal that stays · *Shi Zhi (食滞)*

The meal that will not go down: heaviness, bloating after meals, food-smelling belching, heavy breath. It is the digestive system overloaded: too much volume, too much speed, too much fermentable matter for the terrain of the moment. Strategy: help the descent with gentle pungents and digesting foods, reduce the load, and bring the meal back to its proper size.

FOOD	NATURE	FLAVOUR	ACTION	PRACTICAL ADVICE
Daikon : Chinese Radish	Warm	Pungent, Sweet	Brings stagnation down, clears congestion	*The daikon of evening kitchens: grated into soup, it is the vegetable that 'makes the stalled meal go down'.*
Black radish	Cool, Neutral	Pungent, Sweet	Brings stagnant Qi down, drains	*In a light salad or soup: the radish that clears the congested centre.*
Oregano	Warm	Pungent	Moves Qi, digests stagnation	*The herb of pizzas because it digests the dish: in infusion or on vegetables, it unlocks the meal that stalls.*
Cardamom	Warm	Pungent	Moves, transforms the centre's Dampness	*The crushed pod in the dish or infusion: the spice that unlocks stagnation.*
Caraway (seed)	Warm	Pungent	Digests stagnation, dissipates bloating	*The seed of cabbage and heavy dishes: it accompanies meals that risk staying down.*
Dill (seed)	Warm	Pungent	Unties Qi, calms centre tension	*Infused after the meal or in the dish: the seed that makes the heavy meal forgotten.*
Star Anise	Warm	Sweet, Pungent	Moves Qi, dissipates cold and stagnation	*One star in broth or infusion: the digestif of great Asian cuisines.*
Basil (Aromatic)	Warm	Sweet, Pungent	Opens Qi, brings stagnation down	*Chopped at the end: the leaf that clears the top of the stomach.*
Coriander (aromatic herb)	Warm	Pungent	Opens Qi, harmonises the centre	*Fresh at the end of the dish: the gesture that lets the heavy meal pass.*
Pineapple	Neutral	Sweet, Sour	Digests through its enzymes, brings stagnation down	*A fresh slice after a festive meal: bromelain helps the stalled bolus descend.*
Tea	Cool	Sweet, Bitter	Clears, brings stagnation down	*Light tea after the heavy meal: the bitterness that washes the conduit.*
Vinegar	Warm	Sour, Sweet	Acid that digests, brings stagnation down	*The end-of-meal dressing: the acidity that helps transform the heavy bolus.*

TO LIMIT	NATURE	REASON
Hearty meals eaten too quickly	Variable	The pattern's first cause is the load: the volume the stomach cannot churn becomes stagnation; the first remedy is meal size.
Pulses in large portions	Variable	Lentils, chickpeas and beans bring fermentable GOS: good food, wrong dose for a congested gut.
Onion, cauliflower, Jerusalem artichoke	Variable	Fructans and inulin are the most gas-producing FODMAPs: reserved for small, well-cooked doses.
Sodas and fizzy drinks with meals	Variable	Gas + sugar + polyols: the triple load of mechanical bloating that worsens stagnation.

GOLDEN RULE

Bring down before filling: a congested gut does not ask for food but for circulation. Gentle pungents, digesting foods, small loads: stagnation is unravelled, not blocked further.

MODERN NUTRITION

FODMAPs produce their effect by measured mechanism: fermentation gas + osmotic water drawn into the conduit, that is, physical bloating (Gut review, 2017). The gluten story is exemplary: Biesiekierski (AJG, 2011) showed gluten guilty in a double-blind trial, then the same team (Gastroenterology, 2013) acquitted it: after FODMAP reduction, gluten no longer caused anything; wheat fructans were the real culprit. That is scientific honesty at its best: the IBS 'gluten-free' is mostly 'fructan-free'. Prebiotics and probiotics help in meta-analysis (Alimentary Pharmacology, 2018) but effects remain modest: meal load remains the first lever.

CROSS-CUTTING ADVICE

Valid whatever the pattern

Beyond the seven patterns, a few rules hold for every irritable gut: rhythm reassures the enteric nervous system as much as the plate nourishes it, and FODMAP is a diagnostic tool, not a destination.

- Keep a meal-symptom diary for fifteen days: IBS triggers are personal; the only reliable diet is the one the gut reveals itself.
- Eat seated, chew, put down the cutlery: the migrating motor complex, the small intestine's cleaner, needs marked meals and calm to work.
- Keep regular mealtimes: three proper meals beat eight snacks that never let the intestine rest.
- Prefer gentle cooking (steaming, braising, stewing): cooked is always easier to transform than raw for an irritable gut.
- Hydrate between meals, warm or room-temperature water: never iced, never in large amounts during meals.
- Light, early dinner: in the evening transit slows and the Liver prepares for the night; the last meal is not meant to weigh.
- Go out and move gently after meals: ten minutes of walking circulates gut Qi better than many supplements.
- Work the top before the bottom: breathing, stress management, lifestyle rhythm. IBS is a brain-gut dialogue; the plate is only one word of it.

IN THE KITCHEN

Adapted recipes

Everyday, gentle French staples

Veal Blanquette — France

The braise par excellence: tender protein, hot broth, melting vegetables. The dish that nourishes without defying the Spleen.

Apple Compote with Cinnamon — France/Europe

Cooked apple + cinnamon: the gentle pectin that soothes transit and the heat that supports the centre.

Trout en Papillote with Vegetables — France

Steamed, mild fish, melting vegetables: the least irritating complete meal there is.

Chicken Waterzooi with Leeks — Belgium

The gentle Northern stew: chicken in light broth, melting vegetables. Adapt the leeks (fructans) to calm days.

Traditional pot-au-feu — France

Broth + long-cooked vegetables: the ancestor dish of French dietetics, entirely in the spirit of congee.

Quince and Apple Compote — Germany

Astringent quince + apple: the dessert that gently tightens the loose stools of Spleen deficiency.

Verbena Infusion — France

The tea of the clenched gut: verbena in the evening relaxes Qi before the night.

The world's broths, by pattern

Job's Tears and Chicken Congee with Ginger — China

The queen porridge of Spleen deficiency: Job's tears + chicken + ginger, the ancients' food remedy in a single bowl.

Abalone Congee — China

The luxury congee: the prestige version of the same principle, rice melted for hours.

Buckwheat Porridge with Milk — Ukraine / Eastern Europe

The kasha of damp-heat: cool buckwheat in porridge, the grain that clears the furnace.

Chawanmushi with Pigeon Eggs (Savoury Custard) — Japan

The Japanese steamed egg: the gentlest protein there is, in silky custard.

Daikon and Chicken Soup — Thailand

Descending daikon + broth: the soup that brings down the meal that won't go down (stagnation).

Savoury Oat Congee with Mushrooms and Ginger — China

Soluble oats + ginger: the congee that delivers soluble fibre without bran's roughness.

Khichdi, India's rice and lentils — India

Ayurveda's digestive rest dish: rice and lentils melted together, gentle spices: Indian dietetics meets Chinese dietetics.

Fish Soup with Dill — Finland

Mild fish + carminative dill: the soup of the clenched gut, from the North that knows cold.

Rhubarb and Ginger Compote — United Kingdom

Lubricating rhubarb + tempering ginger: the dessert of the intestinal desert.

Canh Chua Cá: Sour-Sweet Fish Soup with Dill — Vietnam

Sour-sweet and dill: the soup that clears and relaxes, from the Mekong delta.

PRACTICAL

Cooking & hygiene tips

1. The morning congee: rice or millet + 8 volumes of water, simmered 45 minutes until the grain melts. The base that feeds the gut without tiring it, to be varied sweet or savoury according to the pattern.
2. The spring onion greens trick: onion fructans are in the bulb, not the green stem. Chopped greens give the scent without the FODMAP.
3. Garlic-infused oil: fructans are not soluble in oil. Heating garlic in oil then removing it gives the taste without the load.
4. Systematic compote: apple, quince, rhubarb, cooked pear. Cooked fruit keeps the soothing pectin and drops the irritating cold.
5. The chewed fennel seed: a small pinch after meals, the pocket carminative that brings the meal down and loosens the gut.
6. The between-meals green tea: between meals, never during. Bitterness clears, tannin does not suffocate digestion in progress.
7. Portions before everything: even a low-FODMAP food becomes problematic in too large a quantity. The Monash threshold depends on the portion, not only the food.
8. The Sunday chicken broth: carcass + ginger + mild aromatics, three hours on low heat. Kept in the freezer for difficult weeks.

THROUGH THE YEAR

Seasonal advice

Spring

Liver Qi wakes up and so does the nervous gut: green the plate (mint, coriander, fennel), go out, and do not add the tension of restriction to the tension of the season.

Summer

Outside heat feeds internal Damp-Heat: cold soups only if Yang holds, lightly cooked fresh vegetables, warm hydration. Beware barbecue salads that cost the tired gut dearly.

Autumn

The return of soups and compotes: the time to reinstall morning porridge before winter, and to harvest the quinces, apples and chestnuts that gently astringe.

Winter

The season of Yang deficiency: non-negotiable hot breakfast, stews, warm spices. Ambient cold doubles digestive chilliness; the little morning congee becomes the first defence.

NOTES FOR THE PRACTITIONER

- This document is a dietary aide-memoire intended for health professionals. It replaces neither medical advice nor an individualised nutritional assessment. IBS is a diagnosis of exclusion: signs that make it resemble something else must be ruled out.
- Warning signs that require prompt medical advice: blood in the stools, unexplained weight loss, fever, pain that wakes you at night, onset after age 50, anaemia, family history of colorectal cancer or IBD. Dietetics never explores these terrains.
- The ancients already treated these terrains: Job's-tears porridge (congee) was listed as a 'work surpassing all remedies' for fragile guts (Yin Shi Xu Zhi, 16th c.), and the lotus seed 'astringes the intestine' (Bencao Bei Yao, 1683). Tradition has caught up with science: gently cooked sweet grains are the soluble fibres that modern trials validate.
- The low-FODMAP diet is a three-phase protocol: short elimination (4 to 6 weeks), systematic reintroduction, personalisation. Never the strict diet for life: it impoverishes bifidobacteria (Staudacher, Gastroenterology 2017). The MTC pattern sheet and FODMAP do not oppose each other: they look at each other, the first indicating the terrain, the second the dose.
- Subtypes shift: a gut can move from IBS-D to IBS-M over time, with stress or age. The sheet helps spot the pattern of the moment, not engrave an identity: reread the differential at each change of season or lifestyle.

To go further: the "Liver-Spleen interaction in digestive disorders", "Clinical differentials: choosing the right digestive syndrome", "Spleen Qi deficiency: the most frequent syndrome", "Food retention and accumulation", "Motility and transit: Liver Wind and the migrating motor complex", and "Dampness and microbiota: balance and dysbiosis" courses at the Yin Shi Academy (formation.yinshi.app).

Yin Shi protocol sheet · Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) · Edition of 19 November 2026

Professional document to hand out or adapt in consultation.