

People with irritable bowel syndrome may experience disordered eating due to condition

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Credit: Markus Spiske from Pexels

New Swinburne-led research has revealed that a third of people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) may suffer from symptoms of disordered eating and orthorexia—an obsession with healthy eating.

This is more than double the rate of those without IBS, highlighting a potentially dangerous pipeline between trying to manage IBS symptoms and getting caught in harmful patterns.

April is IBS Awareness Month, a time to highlight diagnosis, treatment, and quality of life issues experienced by 1 in 5 Australians who suffer from IBS.

Lead author of the study [published](#) in *Neurogastroenterology & Motility* and Swinburne Senior Lecturer in Dietetics Dr. Caroline Tuck says dietary management strategies for IBS may be having a negative psychological impact and this has not been well studied.

"Diets such as low FODMAP have strong evidence to reduce symptoms of IBS. However, as the low FODMAP diet is restrictive, there is potential that it may result in disordered eating behaviors. Equally, eating disorders may lead to IBS in the long term."

"The study suggests that those with IBS and disordered eating are likely to have higher gastrointestinal symptom severity, higher stress and anxiety, and worse food-related quality of life. These characteristics need to be considered in research and treatment approaches."

Along with researchers from Monash University, Dr. Jess Biesiekierski and Nessmah Sultan, the team are urging [clinicians](#) to consider these characteristics when prescribing dietary therapies and for those managing IBS symptoms to seek professional help.

"While orthorexia nervosa has not been officially recognized as an [eating disorder](#) according to the DSM-5, it's crucial that we consider the potential impact that people face when dealing with gut symptoms. More research is needed to better understand the association between IBS and disordered eating such as orthorexia.

"It's an important topic that needs greater awareness. Clinicians should target dietary therapies appropriately in IBS, and when disordered eating is suspected, clinicians should utilize non-restrictive dietary and non-diet focused therapies.

"For those managing IBS with diets such as low FODMAP, we strongly encourage them to work with an accredited practicing dietitian."

More information: Nessmah Sultan et al, Presence and characteristics of disordered eating and orthorexia in irritable bowel syndrome, *Neurogastroenterology & Motility* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/nmo.14797](https://doi.org/10.1111/nmo.14797)

Provided by Swinburne University of Technology

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