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**Association of healthy lifestyle behaviours with incident irritable bowel syndrome**

Ho F, Sun H, Zheng H, et al. [Association of healthy lifestyle behaviours with incident irritable bowel syndrome: a large population-based prospective cohort study](https://gut.bmj.com/content/73/6/922) Gut 2024; 73: 922-931. doi: 10.1136/gutjnl-2023-331254

Ho et al., conducted a prospective study using the UK Biobank investigating how healthy lifestyle habits impact on the risk of developing irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

The study found that following healthy habits such as smoking cessation, optimal sleep, engaging in high physical activity, maintaining a high-quality diet, and consuming alcohol in moderation, significantly lowered the risk of IBS. Individually, not smoking, getting good sleep, and vigorous exercise were linked to lower IBS risk. However, a high-quality diet and moderate alcohol intake did not show significant independent effects but were beneficial when combined with other healthy habits.

The study's strengths include its large sample size, long follow-up period (12.6 years) and prospective design. Some limitations were reliance on self-reported data, potential selection bias, and the study's focus on middle-aged and older adults, limiting applicability to younger populations. The study also used the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) definition rather than the usual ROME IV diagnostic criteria for IBS.

The findings suggest that lifestyle changes may play a role in primary prevention of IBS. Currently no primary prevention is recommended for IBS and this study is among the first to confirm that combining these healthy habits can reduce the incidence of IBS, highlighting the potential of lifestyle changes to lower IBS risk factors.

Other points of interest include: The inverse relationship between smoking and IBS may be linked to smoking's effects on gut motility and inflammation; the quality of sleep’s protective role aligns with this research showing that sleep disorders may exacerbate IBS symptoms; and lastly, the benefits of vigorous physical activity might be due to its positive impact on regulating gut microbiota and reducing gut inflammation.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of co-ordinated public health efforts to promote these behaviours for better gastrointestinal health.