

UNDERSTANDING SIBO

SYMPTOMS, CAUSES AND TREATMENT

As a nutritionist with over 25 years of experience, I'm passionate about helping people uncover the root causes of their gut health challenges. This guide provides practical insights into SIBO, its symptoms, and effective treatment options.

What is SIBO?

SIBO stands for Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth, which, as the name suggests, is an abnormal overgrowth of bacteria normally found in the large intestine. These bacteria feed on undigested food in the small intestine, leading to a range of symptoms and health challenges. Your small intestine is designed to be relatively sterile. It relies on regular waves of movement (known as the migrating motor complex) between meals to clean out bacteria and food particles. If this process is disrupted — due to stress, illness, medications, or other causes — bacteria from the large intestine can start to colonise the small intestine. This is what we call SIBO.

How Does SIBO Affect You?

SIBO can disrupt digestion, nutrient absorption, and overall gut function. The bacterial overgrowth ferments food, producing gases like hydrogen and methane. This fermentation often results in symptoms such as bloating, cramps, diarrhoea, constipation, indigestion, flatulence, and abdominal pain. Many of these symptoms overlap with other gut-related issues, making it essential to identify the root cause through proper testing.

Testing for SIBO

I offer comprehensive gut health testing, including breath tests specifically for SIBO. These tests measure hydrogen and methane levels over several hours after taking a lactose or glucose solution. The results provide valuable insights and form the basis for creating an effective, personalised treatment plan.

SIBO occurs when bacteria normally found in the large intestine grow in excess in the small intestine. This leads to fermentation of undigested food, gas production, and damage to the intestinal lining, which contributes to the wide range of symptoms.

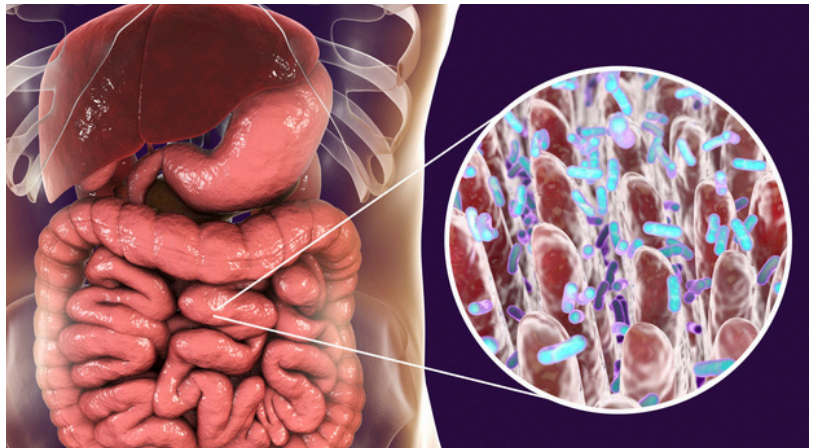
Hydrogen Dominance: More likely to cause diarrhoea and bloating.

Methane Dominance: Associated with constipation and slower gut motility.

Hydrogen Sulphide: Less common but can cause unique symptoms like a rotten egg smell in flatulence.

Treating SIBO

SIBO can be stubborn to treat, so an individualised approach is critical. While antibiotics are an option, they can sometimes be limited in effectiveness. I prefer using a combination of herbal support, gut repair strategies, and strict diet protocols to address SIBO comprehensively and sustainably.



How Bacterial Overgrowth Affects the Gut

Bacterial overgrowth, such as SIBO, has widespread effects on gut function and overall health. While SIBO primarily involves bacterial fermentation in the small intestine, it often coexists with or contributes to other gut imbalances. These imbalances can disrupt digestion, nutrient absorption, and the integrity of the gut lining, leading to more complex and chronic health issues.

Key Impacts of Bacterial Overgrowth:

Gut Dysbiosis:

SIBO can lead to or exacerbate dysbiosis (an imbalance of beneficial and harmful bacteria in the gut). This disrupts the delicate ecosystem of the gut microbiome, potentially worsening symptoms like bloating, diarrhoea, or constipation.

Gut Integrity and Leaky Gut Syndrome:

Persistent bacterial overgrowth can damage the gut lining, increasing intestinal permeability. This condition, often called “leaky gut,” allows partially digested food particles and toxins to pass into the bloodstream, triggering systemic inflammation and food sensitivities.

Impaired Digestion and Nutrient Absorption:

Overgrowth in the small intestine interferes with the breakdown and absorption of key nutrients, leading to deficiencies in vitamins like B12, fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K), and minerals such as iron.

Reduced Gut Immune Function (IgA):

Secretory Immunoglobulin A (IgA) is a vital antibody that protects the gut lining. SIBO can weaken this protective barrier, reducing the gut's ability to defend against pathogens like parasites or yeast overgrowth.

Increased Inflammation:

Chronic bacterial overgrowth leads to elevated levels of gut inflammation. Inflammation markers such as calprotectin can reveal how severely the gut is affected and whether other issues, like colitis, may be contributing to symptoms.

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Common Symptoms of *SIBO*

Digestive Symptoms

Bloating, belching, and flatulence: Common due to excessive food fermentation by bacteria in the small intestine.

Diarrhoea: Often linked to excess hydrogen production.

Constipation: Frequently associated with excess methane production.

Abdominal pain or cramping: Caused by bacterial activity and small intestine irritation.

Heartburn or acid reflux: Due to fermentation and pressure changes in the gut.

Nausea: Caused by bacterial activity or slowed gastric emptying.

Loss of appetite: Often due to discomfort or nausea.

A feeling of fullness: Even after small meals, gas production and slowed motility can create a sensation of satiety.

Systemic Symptoms

Fatigue: Caused by poor nutrient absorption and inflammation.

Brain fog: Linked to toxins produced by bacteria or nutrient deficiencies like B12.

Headaches: Due to gut-brain axis disruption or systemic inflammation.

Joint pain: Likely due to systemic inflammation caused by SIBO.

Weight loss: Resulting from malabsorption of nutrients or Food Fear

Skin and External Symptoms

Acne rosacea: SIBO is often linked to skin issues due to inflammation and imbalances in gut bacteria.

Other skin conditions: Eczema or rashes, possibly linked to food intolerances or inflammation.

Nutritional Deficiencies

Vitamin B12 deficiency: Due to bacterial interference with absorption.

Iron deficiency: Common if SIBO leads to intestinal inflammation or malabsorption.

Fat-soluble vitamin deficiencies (A, D, E, K): Resulting from poor fat absorption.

Gut Barrier Dysfunction

Leaky gut syndrome: SIBO can damage the gut lining, increasing intestinal permeability, which may lead to systemic inflammation and food intolerances.

Food intolerances: SIBO makes it harder to digest certain foods, particularly FODMAPs, dairy, gluten, and histamine.

Less Common Symptoms

Mood changes: Anxiety and depression, potentially due to the gut-brain axis being affected by bacterial toxins.

Respiratory symptoms: Chronic sinus issues or asthma-like symptoms, possibly linked to inflammation or immune activation.

Immune dysfunction: Recurring infections due to a weakened immune system or chronic inflammation.

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Comprehensive Gut Testing and SIBO

While SIBO-specific breath tests are crucial for diagnosing small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, they do not provide a full picture of overall gut health. Comprehensive gut testing is often recommended alongside SIBO tests to assess the broader health of the gastrointestinal system and identify underlying or concurrent issues.

What Comprehensive Gut Testing Reveals:

Yeast Overgrowth: Tests for Candida and other fungi can determine if yeast overgrowth is contributing to symptoms like bloating, fatigue, or skin issues. Yeast overgrowth often coexists with SIBO, particularly after antibiotic use.

Dysbiosis: Identifies imbalances in beneficial and harmful bacteria in the large intestine, which can compound symptoms of SIBO and systemic inflammation.

Parasites: Tests can detect the presence of parasites like Giardia or Blastocystis hominis, which may exacerbate gut symptoms and immune dysregulation.

Gut Integrity and Leaky Gut Markers: Evaluates intestinal permeability and the integrity of the gut lining, providing insights into conditions like leaky gut syndrome.

Secretory IgA (sIgA): Measures the gut's immune function and its ability to protect against pathogens. Low levels of sIgA can make it harder to recover from SIBO and other infections.

Inflammation Markers: Markers such as calprotectin, lysozyme or lactoferrin can indicate levels of gut inflammation and help distinguish between functional issues (like IBS) and inflammatory conditions (like IBD).

Digestive Capacity: Identifies deficiencies in enzymes or bile acids needed for proper digestion, which may contribute to symptoms like malabsorption or fat intolerance.



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What Causes SIBO?

SIBO (Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth) doesn't happen overnight – it usually builds up over time, often due to a combination of underlying issues. Here are some of the most common contributing factors:

- **Low stomach acid** – Stomach acid acts as a natural barrier, helping to kill off unwanted microbes. If acid is low (as it often is with long-term use of antacids or PPIs), bacteria can more easily make their way into the small intestine.
- **Sluggish gut motility** – When the gut isn't moving food along properly (due to constipation, stress, or certain conditions), bacteria have more time to grow where they shouldn't.
- **Post-infectious changes** – A bout of food poisoning, stomach flu, or gastroenteritis can damage the migrating motor complex (MMC), which is your gut's natural "housekeeper" that clears bacteria between meals.
- **Surgical changes** – Operations like gallbladder removal, gastric bypass, or even caesarean section can alter your gut structure or function, sometimes triggering bacterial overgrowth.
- **Chronic stress and trauma** – Ongoing stress can disrupt gut motility and stomach acid production, while trauma may affect the vagus nerve, which plays a major role in digestion.
- **Autoimmune conditions** – Conditions like coeliac disease or scleroderma can impact gut lining and function, increasing the risk of SIBO.
- **Medications** – Antibiotics, steroids, opiates, and even the oral contraceptive pill can change your gut environment in ways that encourage overgrowth.
- **Hormonal changes** – Low thyroid function (hypothyroidism), perimenopause, and menopause can all slow gut movement and impact digestion.
- **Structural issues** – These include adhesions from surgery, diverticula (small pouches in the gut wall), or even endometriosis affecting the bowel.
- **Diet and lifestyle** – A diet high in ultra-processed foods, long gaps between meals, excessive snacking, or a lack of fibre diversity can all reduce beneficial bacteria and promote imbalance.
- **Nutrient deficiencies** – Especially B12, zinc, and magnesium – which are common in those with digestive issues and are essential for motility and immune function.
- **Previous gut infections or parasites** – These can inflame and disrupt the small intestine, leading to longer-term imbalances if left untreated.

SIBO is rarely caused by one single trigger. It's usually a 'perfect storm' of several things going wrong – which is why treating it properly takes time, a personalised plan, and a whole-body approach.

Reach out today to book your free 15-minute discovery call and take the first step toward better gut health.

"After months of bloating and fatigue, I worked with Sarah to identify SIBO as the root cause. Her personalised plan helped me regain my energy and feel like myself again!" – Naomi P.

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Candida

Candida albicans is a type of yeast naturally found in various parts of the body, including the mouth, skin, intestines, and vagina. In most cases, it coexists peacefully within the body's microbiome, causing no harm. However, when Candida grows uncontrollably, it can lead to significant health problems.

How Does Candida Overgrowth Occur?

Several factors can trigger an overgrowth of Candida, including:

- **Poor Diet:** Diets high in sugar and refined carbohydrates can feed Candida, promoting its growth.
- **Medications:** Antibiotics, contraceptive pills, and steroids can disrupt the balance of gut bacteria, allowing Candida to thrive.
- **Weakened Immune System:** Stress, illness, or chronic conditions can reduce the body's ability to keep Candida under control.

Symptoms of Candida Overgrowth

Candida overgrowth can manifest in various ways, often mimicking other conditions like SIBO. Common symptoms include:

- **Digestive Issues:** Bloating, diarrhoea, or constipation.
- **Skin Problems:** Thrush, fungal acne, athlete's foot, fungal nail infections, and rashes.
- **Respiratory Issues:** Chronic sinus infections or nasal congestion.
- **Systemic Effects:** Fatigue, brain fog, and a weakened immune system.

Candida and Leaky Gut

An overgrowth of Candida in the intestines can damage the gut lining, contributing to leaky gut syndrome. This condition increases intestinal permeability, allowing toxins, food particles, and bacteria to enter the bloodstream. The result is often systemic inflammation, food sensitivities, and fatigue.

Treatment for Candida Overgrowth

Treating Candida requires a comprehensive approach to restore balance in the gut and overall health:

Dietary Changes:

- Eliminate or reduce sugar, refined carbohydrates, and processed foods that feed Candida.
- Focus on whole, nutrient-dense foods, including non-starchy vegetables, healthy fats, and high-quality proteins.

Address Underlying Causes:

- Identify and treat contributing factors like antibiotic overuse or hormonal imbalances.

Support Gut Repair:

- Once the Candida overgrowth is managed, repair the gut lining using targeted supplements such as glutamine, zinc carnosine, and probiotics.
- Reintroduce beneficial gut bacteria with probiotic strains known to combat yeast, such as *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* and *Saccharomyces boulardii*.

Herbal or Antifungal Support:

- In some cases, antifungal medications or natural remedies like caprylic acid, garlic, and oregano oil may be used to target Candida directly.

Candida and SIBO: What's the Connection?

Although Candida and SIBO are distinct conditions, they often coexist due to shared risk factors, such as poor diet or disrupted gut bacteria. Both can contribute to symptoms like bloating, fatigue, and leaky gut. Comprehensive testing can differentiate between Candida overgrowth and SIBO, ensuring the correct treatment approach is taken.

Moving Forward

If you suspect Candida overgrowth, testing and a personalised treatment plan are essential for lasting results. By addressing both Candida and the underlying factors that caused the imbalance, you can restore gut health, strengthen your immune system, and improve overall well-being. I offer comprehensive SIBO breath tests and gut health assessments to identify the root causes of your symptoms. These results are the foundation of a personalised treatment plan tailored to your unique needs.

Gut health can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to navigate it alone. With the right support and a tailored approach, you can take back control of your health and feel your best again.

Reach out today to book your free 15-minute discovery call and take the first step toward better gut health.

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