

SIBO (small intestinal bacterial overgrowth)

What is SIBO?

Small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) occurs when there is an abnormal increase in the number or type of bacteria in your small intestine. While bacteria are a normal and essential part of your gut, having too many in the wrong part of the digestive tract can lead to uncomfortable symptoms and digestive issues.

What causes SIBO?

SIBO often develops when something disrupts the normal movement of food and bacteria through your digestive system, allowing bacteria to multiply in the small intestine. Common causes include:

- **Motility disorders** conditions that slow down the movement of food, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or diabetes-related nerve damage
- **Structural issues** such as bowel surgery, scarring, or adhesions that affect the normal flow of food
- **Conditions affecting the immune system** which can alter the balance of gut bacteria
- **Low stomach acid** reducing the stomach's ability to kill bacteria before they enter the small intestine
- **Medications** such as long-term use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) or antibiotics, which can disrupt gut flora

What are the symptoms of SIBO?

The symptoms of SIBO can vary depending on the severity of the condition but commonly include:

- Bloating and excessive gas
- Abdominal pain or discomfort
- Diarrhoea or loose stools
- Constipation
- Nausea or feeling full quickly after eating
- Unintentional weight loss
- Fatigue or weakness
- Nutritional deficiencies, such as low levels of vitamin B12

If left untreated, SIBO can lead to long-term issues like malnutrition and damage to the small intestine, so it's important to seek medical advice if symptoms persist.

How is SIBO diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to confirm SIBO and determine the best treatment approach. Tests may include:

- **Hydrogen or methane breath test** a simple, non-invasive test where you'll drink a sugar solution, and your breath will be analysed for gases produced by bacteria in the small intestine
- **Small intestine aspirate and culture** during an upper GI endoscopy. A sample of fluid from

your small intestine may be taken to identify the type and number of bacteria present

- **Blood tests** to check for nutritional deficiencies or markers of inflammation

Your consultant will review your medical history and symptoms to ensure an accurate diagnosis.

How is SIBO treated?

Treatment for SIBO typically focuses on reducing the bacterial overgrowth and addressing the underlying cause. Options may include:

- **Antibiotics** to reduce the excess bacteria in your small intestine. Your doctor will choose the most appropriate type based on your symptoms and test results
- **Dietary changes** adopting a low-FODMAP diet or other specific eating plans may help reduce symptoms by limiting the types of food that feed bacteria
- **Probiotics** in some cases, these may help restore the balance of gut bacteria
- **Addressing underlying conditions** treating conditions such as diabetes, IBS, or motility disorders can help prevent SIBO from recurring

Your consultant will work with you to create a personalised treatment plan tailored to your needs.

Can SIBO be prevented?

While not all cases of SIBO can be prevented, certain steps may reduce your risk:

- Managing conditions like diabetes or IBS with the help of your doctor
- Avoiding overuse of antibiotics, which can disrupt your gut bacteria
- Eating a balanced diet rich in whole foods and fibre to support gut health
- Staying hydrated and maintaining regular physical activity, which can improve gut motility

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we specialise in diagnosing and treating SIBO and other digestive conditions with state-of-the-art technology and a patient-centred approach. Our experienced team will provide you with expert care and guidance, ensuring you receive the right diagnosis and treatment plan to relieve your symptoms and restore your digestive health.

Contact us

If you're experiencing persistent bloating, abdominal pain, or other digestive symptoms, contact Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment of SIBO can make a significant difference in improving your quality of life.