

The great gut mix-up.

IBS or SIBO? How the two differ, how they overlap, and how to get treatment matched to what is actually happening.

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What is the difference between IBS and SIBO?

SIBO — small intestinal bacterial overgrowth — is a specific condition in which excessive bacteria colonise the small intestine, producing gas that causes bloating, distension, and diarrhoea or constipation. **IBS** — irritable bowel syndrome — is a functional disorder diagnosed by symptoms (abdominal pain, altered bowel habit, bloating) without a single underlying cause like bacterial overgrowth.

The key overlap: SIBO can cause IBS-like symptoms, and people with IBS may also have SIBO. The two are not mutually exclusive.

Why does it matter?

- Treatment differs — SIBO is treated with antibiotics or herbal antimicrobials; IBS management focuses on diet, stress, and nervous system regulation.
- Testing differs — SIBO has a specific diagnostic test (hydrogen/methane breath test); IBS is diagnosed by symptom criteria.
- Outcomes differ — treating SIBO can resolve symptoms in some people; IBS management is typically longer-term and focuses on capacity-building.

How is SIBO diagnosed and treated?

- Diagnosis — hydrogen and methane breath testing after lactulose or glucose; elevated gases in the small-intestine window (0–90 minutes) indicate SIBO.
- Treatment — rifaximin (a non-absorbed antibiotic) is first-line; herbal antimicrobials are alternatives; dietary modification during treatment; repeat testing to confirm eradication.

What should I do?

- If you have persistent bloating with diarrhoea or constipation, SIBO testing is reasonable — knowing your status lets treatment be targeted.
- Match treatment to diagnosis: SIBO needs antimicrobial treatment; IBS needs broader nervous system work — and even with SIBO, managing your threat system and diet improves outcomes.
- Work with providers experienced in gut–brain disorders — SIBO diagnosis and treatment is nuanced.

You don't need to choose between SIBO and IBS — they can coexist. What matters is understanding what is happening in your system, so treatment can be targeted.

NEED SUPPORT?

Questions? consultant@sarahanticich.co.nz · executiveframe.co.nz — and bring this sheet to your next appointment if you would like to talk it through.

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