

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF IBS

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common health condition but little is known about it, and symptoms can impact people's everyday lives.

THE RESEARCH

Research from The University of Sheffield explored what it means to live with the common condition, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). 25 people who identified as living with IBS took part in the research by **completing a daily diary and a follow up qualitative interview**. They were asked how the condition affected the places **people could or couldn't go, the routines of their day, and their interactions and relationships**.

FINDINGS

Negotiating dietary requirements

including uncertainties of what foods to eat and how dietary changes are met with public understandings and attitudes

Managing symptoms of IBS within the home and in public life and ensuring privacy in both.

This includes carrying personal belongings such as spare tissues, change and medication in the presence of symptoms.

Being aware of the role of routines in managing symptoms and often reimagining them e.g. allowing extra time to account for symptoms or slowing down daily routines.

Knowing where toilets are on everyday journeys such as reliable shops and restaurants with toilet facilities, having a mental map of toilets and anticipating toiletry time on daily journeys.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Better structural support and accessibility for those living with IBS related to their everyday lives, working environments and everyday journeys.

Increased awareness and understanding

of what it means to live with IBS with a view to improving support.

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IMPROVING EVERYDAY JOURNEYS FOR PEOPLE WITH IBS

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common health condition but little is known about it, and symptoms can impact people's everyday lives. Accessible toilet facilities facilitate everyday journeys. Knowledge and availability of toilets as part of travel and journeys can improve comfort and social participation for people with IBS.

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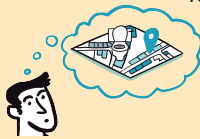
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FINDINGS

Those with IBS explained how **knowledge and availability of toilets were paramount** in facilitating everyday journeys. This included:

having a **mental map of toilet locations** based on comfort and convenience;



a **reliance on commercial spaces for toilets** and encounters of **inaccessibility** for hidden conditions such as IBS;



and **discomforts of toilet provision (or lack of)** on transport services.



“

I find travelling difficult. I think I'm ok with my commute now, its 25 minutes so I'm not too bad, I generally know that I've got time to get to work and be able to get to the toilet if I need to, but **I do find that a longer journey or travelling abroad because you're up at different times can put my stomach on edge.**



RECOMMENDATIONS



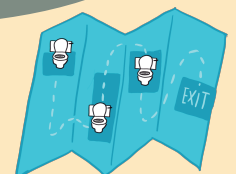
Ensure toilets are **always FREE** to use and **always OPEN**



Easy to access information of toilet facilities when planning journeys



Facilitate training and awareness into radar keys and Can't Wait Cards for those with invisible health conditions to improve access



Improve toilet access and provision on public transport and in transport hubs

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White, L. (2021). 'I have to know where I can go': Mundane mobilities and everyday public toilet access for people living with irritable bowel syndrome. *Social and Cultural Geography*. DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2021.1975165



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HOW TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES LIVING WITH IBS

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a common health condition but little is known about it, and symptoms can impact people's everyday lives. **Improving understandings of the condition could help people with IBS have better and healthier working lives.**

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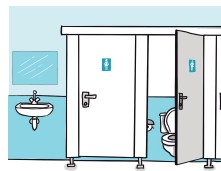


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FINDINGS



Challenges in discussing IBS at work



Issues of comfort and convenience of **accessible toilet provision** at work



Role of **commuting and travel** is significant in navigating **symptoms**



Importance of having enough time or the **flexibility of time to accommodate symptoms**



“

There's a pressure of trying to go to the toilet before work means that I don't go but then **the anxiety means that I then need to go as soon as I get to work** but because I haven't factored in extra time at that point and then I am ending up rushing into the office. It's not something I really talk about, so I tend to say that I was stuck in traffic which I haven't been. **I could talk about it, but I choose not to, I suppose.**

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RECOMMENDATIONS



Allow for **flexible working hours** to give people with IBS autonomy over their time



Provide **working from home as an option**, whilst taking care not to socially exclude



Improve awareness, attitudes and **support** for hidden health conditions in the workplace



Give **mobile workers and commuters time to stop** and take breaks, with toilet facilities



Facilitate **comfortable and accessible toilet provision** at work

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