

While I love taking risks and experience raging FOMO, my bubbly personality was once zapped by fear of food and the discomfort it created. After years of tirelessly searching for answers, it was determined that I suffer from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). You laugh, but this syndrome is more than just uncontrollable bathroom trips. While this finding led to much needed symptom relief, I am now strapped with an abnormally disciplined life. But adversity also led me to my passion for social media, community, and Pepto-Bismol.

When the initial discovery was made, my doctor suggested going low fodmap. I was all-in, eager to finally have a promised solution. The diet cut out foods including: dairy, gluten, onions, garlic, apples, legumes, mushrooms, broccoli, cauliflower and honey- to name a few. As I scrolled through this list I quickly ascended into five stages of grief.

First up, denial. Was my doctor really suggesting I cut out that many foods, cold turkey, on a random Tuesday? Quickly followed anger. Why in the world would my small intestine reject all of these perfectly healthy foods? Next up, rationalizing. Well, at least I'm not a low fodmap vegan, they've got nothing left to eat. The sadness phase hit me hardest. So many of my favorite memories involve food, like birthday cake and fun tropical drinks on vacation. While I can still have my cake, eating it will definitely be a different experience- probably dry and crusty- never quite tasting the same. My thoughts were constantly consumed with food, filling my days with stress. Acceptance, the final stage of grief, didn't come right away.

Equating a diet change to stages of grief, one might conclude I'm dramatic. But eating is perpetual and therefore I found myself facing continual frustration. Honestly, I felt alone. While my entire family enjoyed food without fear, I struggled to find three safe meals that supplied my needs, much less that I liked.

Thankfully, I established an Instagram community to help adapt to my new circumstances. I started @munchinwmorgs, as a way to document enjoyable recipes and meals while tracking my symptoms. At first, I didn't attach my name to the account; being caught by my peers posting oatmeal to a following of one hundred wasn't something I wanted to be known for. But over time, my account grew. Soon I had thousands of followers, liking and commenting on my food. I finally felt confident in how I was fueling my body because I received validation from others experiencing the same thing.

As a child, I loved experimenting with food. I spent all day in my mom's bakeshop, trying to become her sous chef. The skills I learned alongside her didn't go to waste. Now I bake my own breads and prepare my meals, free of high FODMAP foods. I've learned to find solutions to my problems and enjoy documenting them for others.

I've also learned discipline, because if it's lacking, I suffer the consequences. My lifestyle takes extra planning and organizing (so much so my friends have dubbed me "the Morganizer"). Also, I'm a distance runner so eating enough to fuel my training is no small task even when options are limitless. During the season I'm in a constant cycle of planning and packing food.

Finally, I found my passion in videography and social media from the connections I've made online. IBS taught me the importance of supportive communities. I know the value of telling your story because I found help watching and reading others' experiences. Now, I want to study digital marketing because it has amazing potential for impactful communication. In a world dominated by Instagram aesthetics and TikTok trends, I hope to use social media to incite a desire for knowledge, encourage empathy for others, and facilitate communities where people feel known and supported, just like I did when I sought out answers to my irritable situation.