

SYMPTOMS AND MEDICAL HISTORY DO NOT PREDICT HYDROGEN AND METHANE BREATH TEST OUTCOMES

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A questionnaire study of over 1000 patients found that symptoms and medical history cannot predict lactulose breath test outcomes for small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, except for chronic low ferritin.

KEY POINTS

- In 731 patients who completed lactulose hydrogen and methane breath testing, there were no positive predictors for SIBO based on symptoms, medications, or medical history, with the sole exception of chronic low ferritin ($P = 0.025$).
- Bloating (93.6%), abdominal pain (87.3%), and diarrhoea (80.3%) were the most common symptoms in patients with positive SIBO results, but their duration, frequency, and onset did not differ from those with negative results ($P > 0.05$).
- The study used a 26-item questionnaire and defined positive lactulose breath testing as a rise of ≥ 20 ppm in breath hydrogen from baseline within 90 minutes.
- The findings suggest that empirical treatment of SIBO without breath test confirmation may lead to unnecessary antibiotic use and costs.
- This work is relevant to gastroenterologists managing patients with suspected SIBO or diarrhoea-predominant IBS.

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