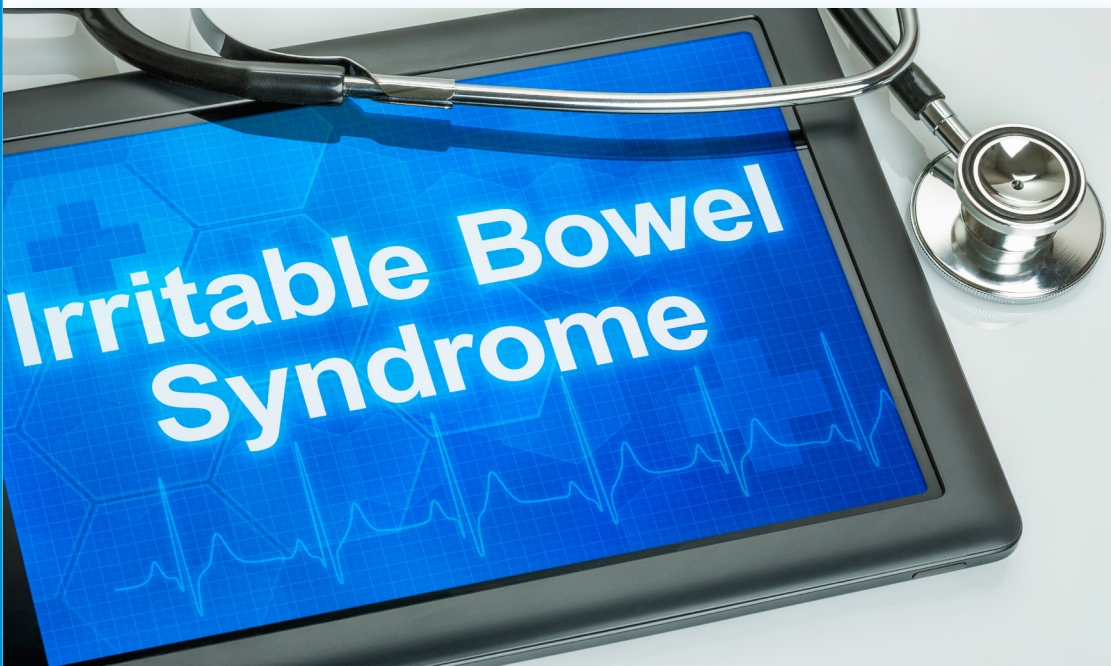




The Ultimate Herbal Health eBook Series

Irritable Bowel Syndrome Natural Solutions

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Ultimate Herbal Health

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INTRODUCTION

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is one of the most common and most annoying, painful problems in modern society.

If you suffer from it then you will most likely have found little long-term help from your doctor and it can be years before there is any medical solution, if at all.

This is because the causes are very complex, poorly understood and difficult to treat with conventional drugs.

In this eBook we are going to briefly outline the symptoms, statistics and proposed causes, then provide you with some potential natural solutions.



SYMPTOMS

Diagnostic criteria for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) include recurrent abdominal pain or discomfort at least 3 days per month in the past 3 months associated with two or more of the following:

- Improvement (Pain reduction) with defecation
- Onset associated with a change in the frequency of bowel motion
- Onset associated with a change in the form (appearance) of stool; and/or
- Criteria fulfilled for the past 3 months with symptom onset at least 6 months before diagnosis.

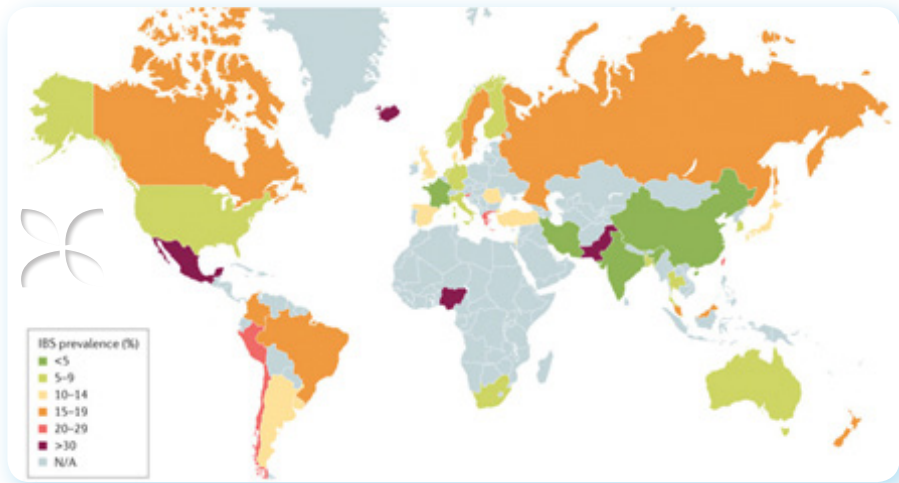
Discomfort means an uncomfortable sensation not described as pain. During screening evaluation, pain or discomfort frequency must be at least 2 days per week to qualify subjects for clinical trials. (1)

It is well established that IBS symptoms give feelings of shame, fearfulness and embarrassment, while patients also report being misunderstood by their doctors, their family members and friends. (12)



STATISTICS

You can see in this chart just how common the problem is worldwide.



To mention just a few, 15-19% of New Zealanders, 10-14% of British and 5-9% of Americans and Australians are affected.

It is interesting how less than 5% of Chinese and Indian people have IBS while Mexicans are over 30%. The obvious question raised here is, has this got something to do with local dietary habits?

POTENTIAL CAUSES OF IBS

Although the cause of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) has not yet been completely understood, multiple factors appear to have a role, including composition of the gut micro-flora, intestinal permeability, immune response and the gut-brain connection.

Gut microflora

The gastrointestinal microflora is a diverse and numerous ecosystem that inhabits the entire gastrointestinal tract and has a systemic influence on our health.

Associations were observed between patients self-reported symptoms and the presence or quantities of certain gut bacteria. Among IBS subjects several gut bacterial strains were significantly reduced. (4)

Microflora activity is different between herbivorous and carnivorous mammals, reflecting trade-offs between carbohydrate and protein fermentation. Foodborne microbes from both diets periodically colonize the gut, including bacteria, fungi and even viruses. These facts demonstrate that the gut microflora can rapidly respond to altered diet. (6)

An imbalance of intestinal microflora and/or the presence of unwanted fungi, bacteria and viruses can disrupt the sensitive mucous membrane of the gut leading to inflammation.



Intestinal permeability

On one hand, an intact intestinal barrier protects the human organism against invasion by micro-organisms and toxins, on the other hand, this barrier must be open to absorb essential fluids and nutrients.

Such opposing goals are achieved by very complex anatomy and physiology. The intestinal barrier represents a huge mucosal surface, where billions of bacteria face the largest immune system of our body. (3)

In one study the permeability of colon tissue samples was found to be significantly higher in patients with IBS compared to healthy subjects. (5)

This may be caused to disturbances to the microflora which in turn may have triggered an inflammatory immune response, resulting in a breakdown of permeable gut barrier.

Immune response

Infectious gastroenteritis is the strongest risk factor for the development of IBS and increased rates of IBS-like symptoms have been detected in patients with inflammatory bowel disease in remission or in celiac disease patients on a gluten free diet. The number of immune cells in the small and large intestine of patients with IBS is increased in a large proportion of patients. (2)

Supporting the immune system and microflora of the gut may be of assistance, improving digestive processes while simultaneously reducing gut inflammation and permeability.

The gut-brain connection



The brain, the gut, its microflora and the immune system present two way communications in health and disease. The brain, via the nervous system, influences intestinal motility and fluid secretion (8), intestinal permeability (3), immune function (10) and gut microflora (11), all of which have been reported to be out of control with IBS as previously mentioned.

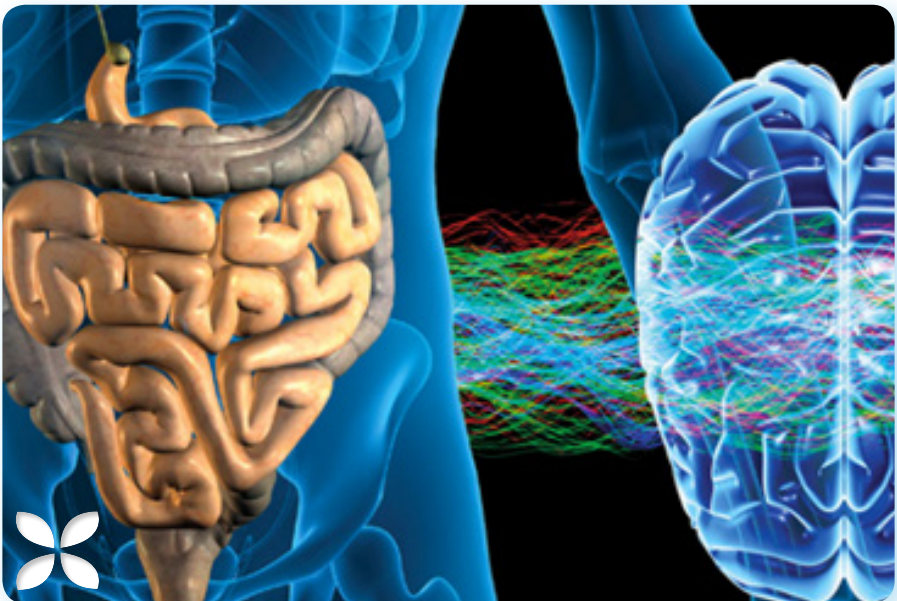
The mental and emotional connection to the digestive system is powerful and must be considered in the context of IBS.

Technically known as the enteric nervous system, the second brain consists of sheaths of neurons embedded in the walls of the long tube of our gut, or alimentary canal, which measures about nine meters end to end from the esophagus to the anus.

The second brain contains some 100 million neurons, more than in either the spinal cord or the peripheral nervous system. (16)

The enteric nervous system uses more than 30 neurotransmitters, just like the brain, and in fact 95 percent of the body's serotonin is found in the bowels.

Irritable bowel syndrome also arises in part from too much serotonin in our entrails, and could perhaps be regarded as a “mental illness” of the second brain. (16)



COMMON ALLOPATHIC TREATMENTS

(mainstream treatments)

The most commonly prescribed drugs for IBS include laxatives, antibiotics, anti-diarrhoeals and anti-depressants.

All of these drugs may provide some temporary relief of symptoms but none offer a long term solution by way of treating the actual cause of the problem. The long-term dietary habits, general gut/digestive health and mental status may not have been resolved. These need to be nurtured.



This is when natural herbal solutions come into their own.

NATURAL SOLUTIONS

When looking at a complex multi-faceted problem like IBS conventional treatments often work short-term but fail to provide long term relief. This is because the problem can be subtle and lie largely within the sensitive realm of dietary, nutritional, emotional and mental concern.

The areas of gut microflora, intestinal permeability, immune response and gut brain connection all fall into strong categories for natural and herbal solutions.

Let's look at each of these areas individually.



GUT MICROFLORA

Diet has a marked impact on gut microflora diversity, understandable given that resident micro-organisms obtain energy for growth via metabolism of dietary nutrients. (13)

The effect of dietary fiber consumption on the intestinal microflora composition, was reported from global population studies with very similar results. Using recent and long-term dietary questionnaires and stool samples from healthy human subjects, microflora analysis demonstrated that diet low in fat and high in dietary fiber was associated with higher positive bacteria, but diet high in fat was more highly associated with negative bacteria.

There has been growing concern that even short-term dietary changes, particularly to a 'Westernised' style diet (high animal fat, high sugar and low in plant-based fiber) can rapidly alter the composition and metabolic activity of resident intestinal microflora, with decreased levels of beneficial bacteria and increased numbers of bile-tolerant, inflammation-associated bacteria (13)

Some of the pre-biotic herbs traditionally used to encourage healthy microflora, reduce negative bacteria and parasites include:

- [Slippery Elm Bark](#)
- [Aloe Vera](#)
- [Golden Seal](#)
- [Cloves](#)
- [Black Walnut](#)

The introduction of Lactobacilli and Bifidobacteria in high dose supplement form or enema may also be useful in the short term, especially where a gut brain connection is involved. (14)

In a recent pilot study of elderly persons, the intestinal load of the positive bacteria lactobacilli was linked to the count of white blood cells, blood glucose and LDL cholesterol, all risk markers of inflammation, metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease. (15)

Using plain unsweetened acidophilus yogurt in smoothies on a regular basis can be of great assistance.

[See my Probiotic smoothie recipes here](#)



INTESTINAL PERMEABILITY

The gut barrier plays a key role in the avoidance of inflammatory responses to the microflora and is regulated by a finely tuned network of immune mechanisms (3)

Because increased intestinal permeability and inflammation go hand in hand, natural methods to reduce intestinal inflammation will be useful.

A diet rich in plant and vegetable fiber has shown to greatly reduce inflammation. A recent demonstration from the Nurses Health study that subjects had 50% lower risk for the development of [Crohn's disease](#), which was directly associated with long-term ingestion of a diet rich in fruit and vegetable fiber. (13)

The Herbal [Detox diet plan](#) promotes a pure fruit and vegetable diet and has been reported to assist with IBS.

Powerful triggers for inflammation are the presence of microorganisms in sites where they do not belong.

Microorganisms contain structures alien to the body. Bacteria and fungi, for example, have cell walls in contrast to human cells that lack these structures, and viruses have unique forms of DNA and RNA. Cells and molecules involved in the inflammatory defense system react immediately against these foreign elements; they are danger signals to the body. (15)



Again this points to supporting the microflora, as above, while also introducing these anti parasitic, antifungal and anti-inflammatory agents.

- [Golden Seal](#) (*pictured*)
- [Cloves](#)
- [Black Walnut](#)
- [Wormwood](#)

Herbal Teas to reduce inflammation and therefore intestinal permeability include:

- Raspberry
- Peppermint
- Chamomile
- Ginger
- Red bush

Try a mixture of these teas in your teapot and drink 2-3 cups daily.



IMMUNE RESPONSE

The intestinal immune system has developed a tightly regulated control to optimize the protection against pathogens, while at the same time avoiding unnecessary immune activity. (15)

Supporting the entire immune system along with the already mentioned anti-inflammatory agents, pre-biotics and probiotics will be the best approach.

You can use foods to do this:

- Mushrooms - which boost our immunity
- Garlic - high in sulfur which boost immunity, other sulphur rich foods, leeks, brassica
- Vitamin C - anything fresh will contain Vitamin C especially lemons, oranges, kiwifruit and fresh green and fruit smoothies
- Colloidal silver - Antimicrobial
- Aloe vera juice - 50ml daily
- Herbs and spices in general will help boost your immunity



MEDITATION

Going back to the brain gut connection, there is an important role for the nervous system to play in IBS. Meditation can play a major part here.

One randomized controlled trial demonstrated that mindfulness training has a substantial therapeutic effect on bowel symptom severity, improved health-related quality of life, and reduced distress. (7)

Interestingly, changes in quality of life, psychological distress, and visceral anxiety were not significantly different between groups immediately after treatment, but evidenced significantly greater improvements in the meditation group at the 3-month follow-up. (7)

This makes sense, as the effects of meditation are known to increase over time.

[See my Meditation method](#)



FURTHER DIETARY ADVICE

There is a lot of theories on dietary advice for IBS but nothing that is conclusive or that can applied to everybody.

Some things seem fairly obvious when you look at the research. Inflammatory foods, lack of pre-biotic containing fruits and vegetables and low fiber intake must all be aggravating factors.

FOODS TO AVOID

Irritating food for the digestive system, includes the following:

- Red Meats
- Added Sugar
- Processed foods in general (including pasta)
- Processed grains especially wheat, and other products containing gluten, pasta, pastry, cake etc.
- Too many nuts and legumes like baked beans, chickpeas and lentils
- Gas forming foods - Raw cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli
- Don't follow a raw food salad diet until the IBS symptoms have gone, as it can introduce too many immediate micro-organisms



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