

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) – Hypnosis Can Help

Irritable bowel syndrome or IBS is a very common gastro-intestinal illness that affects 10-15% of the population. The main symptoms are chronic abdominal pain, and diarrhea and/or constipation. Additional symptoms may include nausea, cramps, bloating, belching, gas, urgency and soiling. IBS is more common in women than men. IBS is diagnosed when medical tests rule out structural or biochemical abnormalities.

Patients find it difficult to be told “everything is normal” when their quality of life is so greatly affected. Their social life may be severely restricted as they need to stay near washroom facilities, they may be embarrassed, or fear they may be in too much pain to enjoy an outing. Standard medical treatment usually includes education about IBS, reassurance, medications and diet change. However, less than half of IBS patients are satisfied with the standard medical treatment.

The good news is that hypnosis and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) are very successful in treating IBS. A 2006 scientific review of 11 studies showed that the average success rate in treating IBS was 87%. These studies compared hypnosis and CBT to standard medical treatment, placebo pills, and other types of therapy. Hypnosis and CBT were clearly superior to these other types of treatment.

What does hypnotherapy for IBS look like? The first session includes taking a history, explaining the treatment and learning about hypnosis and common myths. From the second session onward, specific techniques aimed at controlling and normalizing the gut are introduced. The patient is taught self-hypnosis and is provided with CD's of the hypnosis for home use during the week. The CBT part of the training involves examining eating habits, self-pacing, and stress reduction techniques. The treatment usually lasts 8-12 weeks, because it is common to initially improve and then have a setback. By continuing the treatment for a number of weeks, the patient becomes confident in their ability to handle setbacks and solidifies their progress.

This treatment can also be done in groups. Group treatment reduces the cost and adds the further benefit of providing emotional support and understanding.

If you are interested in individual or group treatment for IBS, or wish further information, please contact the author.

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