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Hypnotherapy Good for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Hypnosis therapy appears to be an effective treatment for a common intestinal disorder known as irritable bowel syndrome, recent study findings suggest.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which affects more women than men, is characterized by a cluster of symptoms including bouts of constipation, diarrhea, abdominal pain and bloating. The cause of the condition is unknown.

Previous study findings have also indicated that hypnotherapy is effective for the condition, thus, the National Health Service in the United Kingdom has consequently established its first hypnotherapy unit, with six therapists on staff. The present study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment among the first 250 patients in the unit.

"This study clearly demonstrates that hypnotherapy remains an extremely effective treatment for irritable bowel syndrome and should prove more cost-effective as new, more expensive drugs come on to the market," according to lead study author Dr. Wendy M. Gonsalkorale of the University Hospital of South Manchester, UK, and her colleagues.

Study participants underwent 12 hypnotherapy sessions during a 3-month period, and were told to use an audiotape to practice the techniques between the sessions.

After undergoing hypnotherapy, patients reported overall improvement in their condition as well as improvement in specific areas such as the severity and frequency of their pain, bloating, dissatisfaction with their bowel habits and the extent to which IBS interfered with their life, study findings indicate.

In fact, more than three-quarters (78%) of the study participants reported improvements in their bowel habit, or stool frequency and consistency, after they underwent hypnotherapy, the investigators report in *The American Journal of Gastroenterology*. The remaining individuals experienced either no change or a slight deterioration.

Symptoms reported by the patients that were unrelated to the colon, such as lethargy, bodily aches and backache, also improved after hypnotherapy, the report indicates. Further, the therapy also reportedly improved the patients' quality of life--including their psychic and physical well-being--and reduced their anxiety and depression.

Yet the treatment seemed to be more effective for women than for men, study findings suggest.

At the start of the study, women rated their IBS and non-colon-related symptoms as more severe than did the men and had complaints of more severe bloating, the report indicates. After hypnotherapy, however, the women rated their IBS and non-colon-related symptoms lower than the men.

The difference in scores may have largely been due to the fact that men with diarrhea showed less improvement than did their female peers with diarrhea, particularly in the extent to which the IBS condition interfered with their life and their dissatisfaction with their bowel habit, according to the researchers.

For example, these men reported having an average 28 stools per week after hypnotherapy in comparison to 21 stools per week reported by the women. Also, only 54% of the men said their bowel habit improved in comparison to 82% of the women.

In light of these findings, hypnotherapy "may be less useful in males with diarrhea-predominant bowel habit," the researchers conclude.



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