

Disorders of the Gut

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Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) often feels like floating in a life raft during a tropical storm. The waves of diarrhea and constipation, pain and bloating are wearing and depressing. If you suffer from these symptoms, you join the nearly 20% of Americans who suffer from Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

As a syndrome, IBS is, according to Dr. Kevin Logan, an Indianapolis internist, “a compilation of symptoms, and there is usually an underlying problem causing them.” The symptoms may indicate other digestive disorders such as Crohn’s, allergies, and parasites. If a colonoscopy or endoscopy do not reveal any clear disorder, IBS is diagnosed. Dr. Glen A. Lehman, gastroenterologist at Indiana University School of Medicine, explained that once certain disorders are ruled out, IBS is generally the diagnosis in people under 40 whose symptoms worsen after eating. For patients over 40, a colonoscopy is done to rule out cancer. There is no scientific finding to link IBS as a precursor to cancer.



Dr. Kevin Logan M.D.

Stress, A Likely Cause

Identifying a single cause of IBS is difficult. “There are many things we don’t know,” states Dr. Lehman. Stress is one possible cause. As Dr. Lehman said, “A bad experience for a youth may rev up the nervous system of the gut forever. How fearful of an event does it take—being raped or being told that you are worthless because you won’t eat your spinach?” Stress can affect the nerves in the gastrointestinal tract preventing motility causing constipation or causing too much motility and spasms resulting in diarrhea. Dr. Logan, who also practices holistic medicine, said that “stress may play a role in some of the digestive disorders.” When the body is stressed, the sympathetic nervous system turns the body into fight or flight mode. Increased adrenalin and increased blood flow to the muscles and the brain by-pass the gut and decrease digestion. “You don’t need to digest when you are running from a tiger,” declared

Logan.

Dr. Kara Tedder, Pharm D. and Consulting Pharmacist for Comprehensive Therapy Specialists, LLC, believes that constipation predominant IBS may be a result of excess stress. When the body is in a constant state of stress, the nerves are affected and can have a negative and sometimes numbing affect on the intestinal peristalsis, the rhythmic movement of the smooth muscle in the intestines that pushes food through the digestive tract. Physical, psychological and immunological stressors on intestinal motility, secretion, inflammation and permeability are major factors in digestive disorders.

Under stress, people may rely on fast food in the car for a meal. Eating quickly and indiscriminately leads to indigestion. They may take an antacid or proton pump inhibitor like Prilosec®. But antacids reduce stomach acid by preventing proper digestion, leading to more gas and bloating.

When symptoms arise from stress, Logan said, “Any stress reduction technique such as acupuncture, exercise, taking time simply to have a meal, and making good choices and food combinations would be beneficial.” A 2007 study published in the *Journal Compilations, Alimentary Pharmacology and Therapeutics* shows that relaxation training can reduce IBS symptoms.

Constipation or Diarrhea?

Why do some people have constipation predominant IBS and others have diarrhea predominant IBS? Dr. William Kessler, gastroenterologist and Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine Indiana University stated that motor activity in the small bowel and the colon determines which type. If there is more activity in the small intestine and colon, the result is diarrhea. Less activity results in constipation. The reason why one person has one type and another person has a different type is not known. The gastrointestinal tract has its own nervous system called the enteric nervous system. Serotonin in the gut plays a large part. “There are increased levels of serotonin released after a meal. Increasing or decreasing the level of serotonin or the activity of the receptors can help manage the level of discomfort associated with IBS,” according to Dr. Kessler.

Get That Fiber

An array of treatment options, from drugs to herbs, can be confusing. For constipation-associated IBS, patients can try over the counter laxatives like Milk of Magnesia®, and Miralax®. More fiber, such as dried fruits, vegetables and powdered fiber may help. Psyllium, which comes from the husks of the Psyllium or Desert Indianwheat plant, is the main ingredient in many bulk laxatives, such as Metamucil® and is available in bulk at most health food stores, such as the Good Earth Food Store in Broad Ripple. Psyllium has also been shown to lower total cholesterol and low-density lipoproteins (“bad cholesterol”).

Fiber is still recommended for diarrhea predominant IBS, but Dr. Kessler stated that it is used in lower doses, maybe 10-15 grams per day, whereas the constipation predominant patients are prescribed

30grams per day. “The problem is that fiber, like psyllium, is better but it can cause more bloating; Citricel® is not as potent, but it does not cause as much bloating and therefore may be a more desirable product,” according to Dr. Kessler. For diarrhea predominant IBS, medicines that paralyze the peristalsis like Imodium A-D®, or Lomotil® are recommended. Hyoscyamine or Dicyclomine are both prescription drugs that decrease the muscle spasms.

From the Pharmacy.....

Zelnorm® was previously on the market for chronic constipation associated with IBS. Dr. Lehman, who expressed disappointment regarding this drug, had never written a prescription for it because it was expensive, and the research studies indicated only a slight improvement over taking nothing at all. “This was an example of American Pharmacia where you have a drug with little benefit promoted really hard to make lots of money.” Dr. Kessler explained that Zelnorm® was taken off the market for increased cardiovascular complications and has been brought back on the market restricted to females less than 55 years of age with no history of heart disease suffering from constipation predominant IBS or chronic idiopathic (no known reason) constipation.

Amitiza® is the newest drug for chronic constipation. Chloride-rich fluids are normally present in the small intestine and keep the digestive process running smoothly; however, if there is not enough fluid or the muscle contractions slow down, the stool becomes hard, dry and difficult to pass. Amitiza® is the first drug to help activate the chloride channels in the intestine to assist the flow of fluid through the intestinal tract, allowing the stool to pass easier. This drug is only indicated for chronic idiopathic constipation; however, it is being used in IBS patients along with low doses of anti-depressants.

Anti-depressant drugs such as Prozac®, Zoloft®, Cymbalta®, and Effexor® have had some success for off label use (use other than indicated on the label) for IBS relief. Patients suffering from IBS are often depressed and anxious.

Since IBS is the most common gastrointestinal disease in adult Americans according to Dr. Lehman, there are always going to be new drugs for IBS in the research and development stage. “If you can find a drug that will work for some, you will quickly become a billionaire. Everyone is working on a possible drug; some for financial reasons and good reasons as well.”

Bacteria and Hydrotherapy

A growing number of physicians resist drug therapy to treat IBS. Dr. Logan believes that “pharmaceutical drugs are used to mask the symptoms, but they don’t solve the underlying problem.” The real causes of the diarrhea, constipation, bloating or gas, according to Dr. Logan, “are usually mal-digestion, mal-absorption, bacterial overgrowth, and parasitic infection or yeast overgrowth.” IBS is a term that has no meaning for Dr. Logan because it does not consider the actual problem. “When they are not digesting, you treat the problem and they basically get better.”

Probiotics, a new treatment for IBS, are non-toxic “live,” non-pathogenic bacteria that can relieve IBS. These “good” bacteria or microflora, such as Bifidobacteria species and Lactobacilli species line the intestines and help the immune system fight foreign invaders. But with viral illnesses, a bad diet, or other infections, an imbalance leading to overgrowth of bad bacterial, and smaller

amounts of the good, can lead to IBS symptoms.

While research on probiotics continues, they offer a low cost and low risk alternative to drug therapy. When choosing a probiotic, be sure the bottle has a date stamp and the label states “live bacteria.” This would also include yogurt products and Kefir as well. Some probiotics require refrigeration. For those with dairy allergies or lactose intolerance, probiotics made with carrots replace milk derived



Probiotics from Good Earth

products. These products are available through physicians like Dr. Logan or from health food stores such as Good Earth or Nature’s Cupboard.

Colonics (hydrotherapy) are growing among IBS patients. Performed by certified hydrotherapists, this procedure clears the colon and large intestine of lodged material. Dr. Tedder speaks fondly of Dorothy Kegg, a certified therapist in Westfield, Indiana who is ever watchful for parasites and signs of problems detected in the stool. “She has seen huge and small parasites wash right out of people’s colons that have made them so sick.”

Begin With A Healthy Diet.....

A common denominator for intestinal health is a good, balanced diet. Too much white flour, white sugar, processed foods and not enough whole grains, fresh vegetables, and lean meats can lead to or exacerbate intestinal problems. After improving the diet, identify the sources of stress in your life and find ways to relax.

If symptoms continue, consult with your physician. If you’re not sure where to go, your neighborhood pharmacist can help direct you. Intestinal dysfunction is not something many of us are comfortable talking about, but it is very common. If you suffer, realize that you are not alone and get the medical attention you need. The National Institute of Health has a very helpful website at <http://www2.niddk.nih.gov/>. Don’t suffer, get relief.