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Hypnosis Relieves Symptoms of IBS

By Paul Gustafson

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Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a chronic gastro-intestinal (GI) condition with no known cause or cure. It causes the GI tract to move too quickly (hypermotility) or too slowly (hypomotility) and the resulting symptoms include any one or a combination of the following: diarrhea, constipation, cramping, gas, pain or bloating. Symptoms usually run in cycles lasting for days, months or years. IBS can be disabling making sufferers feel like prisoners in their own home.

IBS affects 35 million Americans, 4 of 5 are women, and it is more prevalent than asthma, diabetes, acid reflux and depression combined. There are likely millions who never pursue treatment due to embarrassment. 10% of all primary care physician visits are IBS related. It is the 2nd leading cause for employee absenteeism and costs the US 8 billion dollars/year.

Diagnosing IBS is a process of exclusion which means a physician needs to rule out conditions such as lactose intolerance, Chron's disease, bacterial infections, parasites, dumping syndrome, ulcerative colitis, inflammatory bowel disease, celiac and gallbladder disease before a diagnosis of IBS can be determined.

The onset of symptoms ranges between the ages of 20-29 in adults and 9-11 in children. Onset of symptoms can sometimes be traced back to a traumatic event, illness, injury or accident. Some clients just begin having symptoms early in life for no apparent reason at all. IBS is also known to be familial. Many IBS sufferers go through life with no idea of what normal gastro-intestinal function is like. IBS symptoms can be aggravated by stress, chocolate, caffeine, alcohol, foods high in animal or vegetable fat, beverages containing dyes, artificial sweeteners, food or medication sensitivities or hormone fluctuation but none are the cause. Some research indicates that IBS sufferers may have an abundance of specialized cells in the intestinal tract making them more reactive and sensitive.

Irregular GI motility is responsible for the discomfort and inconsistent bowel movements. If the GI tract moves too quickly the body doesn't get enough time to absorb what it needs resulting in diarrhea. If it moves too slowly the body absorbs too much resulting in constipation. This erratic pattern can dramatically affects how nutrients are absorbed and how effective the colon absorbs waste out of the blood stream. (1)

Traditional medical intervention includes high fiber diets, antispasmodics to relieve cramping and spasms; antidepressants to relieve the emotional burden and antidiarrhea medication. Research indicates that this approach offers symptom relief to only 25%. Because IBS is not life threatening, is

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not a precursor to acute illness and is undetectable with diagnostic equipment, sufferers are usually told they have to live with it.

Hypnosis is the process of accessing subconscious thought which is the control center. The reason hypnosis is so effective for weight loss and smoking cessation is because the subconscious is where all of our habits, patterns, values and beliefs reside.

Clients can be empowered to reframe their view of nutrition, exercise and to release unhealthy patterns in favor more positive ones. The subconscious mind also regulates our body's inner network of complicated mechanisms. It regulates our heart and respiratory rate, co-ordinates every step we take and controls the thousands of metabolic functions everyday of our lives. With unique access to this immensely powerful place hypnosis can positively redirect specific areas of GI function.

Hypnosis as a treatment for IBS has been researched for 20 years and although it does not offer a cure it stands alone as the most significant long term symptom relief solution. The success rate of

hypnosis relieving IBS symptoms including abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea and/or constipation is consistently high ranging from 70–95%. Symptom relief usually lasts at least two years.

Clients who do not respond as well to hypnosis treatment for IBS relief are those over 50 years of age, who are less open to process of hypnosis, those with psychiatric disorders, and one study indicates males with diarrhea as their major symptom. (2)

For decades hypnosis has been one of the most misunderstood and overlooked holistic sciences but that is changing quickly. The best way to gain acceptance by the mainstream medical community is with the empirical evidence from scientific research. For 20 years researchers like Olafur S. Palsson, Peter Whorwell, William Gonsalkorale and L.A. Houghton have been studying the benefits of hypnosis for symptoms of IBS. The following are brief descriptions of some of their findings.

One study compared 25 severe IBS clients treated with hypnosis to 25 patients with similar symptom severity treated with other methods. The hypnosis group showed that in addition to significant IBS symptom improvement they had fewer MD visits, lost less work time and rated an improved quality of life. Hypnosis clients unable to work before treatment went back to work afterwards. The study shows the economic benefits and improved health-related quality of life. (3)

Another study which is the largest to date followed 250 IBS clients who were treated with 12 hypnosis sessions over a 3-month period and they also listened to recorded sessions at home. The conclusions showed dramatic improvement in all IBS symptoms. The average reduction in symptoms was more than 50% as well as increased quality of life and relief from anxiety and depression. (4)

Lastly, the longest study to date treated and followed 204 IBS clients for up to 6 years. 71% showed immediate improvement, and 81% of this group was still improved years later. Quality of life scores were also still significantly improved at follow-up. Patients had less MD visits and required less medication long-term after hypnotherapy. Results indicate that most hypnosis clients benefit for at least five years. (5)

(1) Melissa J. Roth C.Ht., Ph.D.; Hypnosis and Irritable Bowel Syndrome

(2) Olafur S. Palsson, Psy.D. Hypnosis Treatment of IBS, Participate, fall 2002

(3) Houghton LA; Heyman DJ; Whorwell PJ. Aliment Pharmacol Ther, 1996 Feb.

(4) Gonsalkorale WM, Houghton LA, Whorwell PJ. Am J Gastroenterol 2002

(5) Gonsalkorale WM, Miller V, Afzal A, Whorwell PJ. Gut. 2003 Nov.

Paul Gustafson RN, BSN, CH runs HealthyHypnosis.com of Burlington, Massachusetts. His 11 years of acute cardiac and hospice experience offer a solid foundation supporting his clinical approach to

hypnotherapy. Visit HealthyHypnosis.com or call toll free at 888-290-3972.

Using hypnotherapy to beat IBS

By Sophie Lee

Hypnotherapy is one of the best known and most widely used treatments for IBS, and can offer sufferers a drug-free solution to their symptoms of diarrhea, constipation, stomach pain and bloating.

There are now many hundreds of hypnotherapists who offer what is called "gut-directed hypnotherapy" for IBS, which takes the general techniques of hypnotherapy and applies them directly to the abdominal pain and digestive symptoms which IBS sufferers struggle with. This type of hypnotherapy has been clinically tested and found to be very helpful to many IBS patients.

One of the first studies of hypnotherapy for IBS was conducted by Dr Peter Whorwell, a leading expert on IBS and hypnotherapy in the UK. A trial he conducted in the 1980s found that a group of IBS sufferers who had failed to respond to other treatments showed dramatic improvements when treated with gut-directed hypnotherapy. Since then, other therapists have shown similar results.

What hypnotherapy involves

Hypnotherapy in a medical setting bears no relation to the kind of stage hypnosis where volunteers are made to do ridiculous things in the name of entertainment. In fact, patients remain entirely in control of their own actions, and are simply coaxed into a kind of deep relaxation state.

While the patient is in this state the therapist will talk to you and make positive suggestions - one typical method for IBS is to ask you to place your hand over your abdomen and imagine that a healing warmth is flowing from your hand to your stomach.

Some hypnotherapists will record each session for you so that you can listen to them again between your appointments, and therefore increase the effectiveness of the therapy.

Self-hypnosis

If you don't have the time or the resources to visit a qualified hypnotherapist, you might find some relief in one of the self-hypnosis CDs available, which can be listened to in the comfort of your own home.

While you will not get an individual treatment program from a ready-made CD, you will be able to benefit from the general hypnosis approach, and you can choose to listen to the CDs whenever you have the time.

The IBS Audio Program, developed by the UK hypnotherapist Michael Mahoney, is the most widely used program for IBS sufferers, and is available on audio CD and cassette. The program is designed to be used over 100 days, and includes four CDs and a program booklet. The makers claim that around 80% of listeners experience a significant reduction of pain and bowel dysfunction.

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The program consists of three therapeutic session CDs, with an introduction and five different

hypnotherapy sessions. It also includes a bonus fourth CD (the IBS Companion), which explains IBS to non-sufferers.

Sophie Lee has suffered from IBS for more than 15 years. She runs IBS Tales

where you can read hundreds of personal stories from IBS sufferers and self-help tips.

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