

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

A modern epidemic that can be helped by Turmeric, an ancient spice

If ever there was a Cinderella disease this is it. It is also a prime example of what is known as iatrogenic disease - an illness caused by the treatment given for another illness. Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), causes a mixture of symptoms including severe abdominal pain, bloating of the tummy, diarrhoea or alternating diarrhoea and constipation.

This common condition affects twice as many women as men and is definitely on the increase. The British Digestive Foundation suggests that somewhere between 15 and 30% of the population suffer these distressing symptoms at some time or another. Even going out to a restaurant becomes a problem, as one of the most embarrassing and uncomfortable reactions is the production of excessive wind. You start your meal in a comfortable skirt or trousers and before you finish you're unbuttoning the waist band.

In a lot of cases the history dates from a severe bout of food poisoning or either repeated or very lengthy courses of antibiotics. Quite a large proportion of patients are believed to have some food intolerances and according to Workman, Jones and Hunter at Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge, it was originally estimated to be two-thirds of all sufferers.

They were amongst the earliest of orthodox doctors to use exclusion diets instead of drugs, with considerable success. The first step is to try and identify any foods to which you may be intolerant, but don't waste your money on worthless allergy tests done on bits of hair or spots of blood that you send away through the post. Nor should you be fooled by electronic gadgets linked to a computer that checks you against dozens of different foods and other substances.

Because this is such a vast problem and so poorly treated by conventional medicine, it's tempting to try even the most outlandish of treatments but at best the majority of them do no good, at worst they may even be harmful.

Amazingly up to three quarters of sufferers don't even bother to consult their GP and around 8 million people in the UK put up with IBS as part of their daily lives. The 25% of patients who do seek treatment cost the NHS almost a billion pounds each year, and how much good this money does is doubtful as the result of conventional treatments is extremely disappointing.

One culprit high on the list of possible causes of the IBS epidemic is bran and the craze for using large amounts of bran has spread like wildfire as a treatment for constipation. There's also been a rash of totally unscientific but popular slimming books hailing bran as the magic key to weight loss and, as a result the number of people suffering from IBS has risen dramatically. Over half of them got worse when treated with bran. Not only is this insoluble fibre irritant, but many high fibre foods are also high in potential allergens. What's more, many of the studies using bran have been of questionable quality and poor design.

If you've had all the tests to rule out any underlying illness, someone will suggest that what you really need is a course of tranquillisers, anti-depressants or psychiatric help. You may even be offered invasive investigations or surgery. There is very little medical evidence that any of these are justified.

The most successful outcome is through diet. You need a reasonable fibre intake but it must come from proper foods not spoonfuls of bran or bran tablets. A large proportion of the fibre should be of the soluble form which comes from pectins in apples, pears, dates and other fruits and vegetables. Glucans, particularly in oats, but to a lesser extent in barley and rye, together with inulin, from globe and Jerusalem artichokes and root vegetables are also valuable forms of soluble fibre. Peas, beans, and leafy vegetables contain insoluble fibres and should be eaten in balance with the soluble sources.

Make sure that you eat plenty of oats, apples, pears, dates, root vegetables, Jerusalem artichokes, globe artichokes, live natural yoghurt and fermented milk drinks like Yakult for their beneficial probiotic friendly bacteria. These essential bugs play a vital role as they not only improve digestion and bowel function but they also protect you against unwanted bacteria and help to boost your body's natural immune system.

You should totally avoid uncooked bran, high fibre breakfast cereals, and any breakfast cereals with added bran. Eat sensible amounts of wholemeal bread, brown rice, wholemeal pasta and other high fibre foods but don't overdo any of them. Eat a little and often and stick to regular meal times which is the first step in relieving the discomfort. Keep the stool soft by drinking at least 3 pints of water a day and you can ease spasmodic contractions of the colon by drinking mint tea after each meal.

Spice Up Your Digestion

Why Turmeric Is Your New Best Friend

Marco Polo was one of the first westerners to spot the potential of this mildly flavoured and useful herb. He thought it reminded him of saffron. Little did he know that in this country, where saffron can be very expensive, many people today do use turmeric in much the same way as saffron - to add a warm, yellow colour and pungent, bitter fragrance to white rice.

Like all pungent spices, it has a gentle, stimulating effect - perfect if you arrive home after a busy day but can't just flop in front of the telly. Many Eastern nations make full use of this and take it as a general tonic.

Turmeric is an essential ingredient of virtually all commercial curry pastes and powders. For a real breakfast wake up call add a pinch to your scrambled eggs as a quick shot in the arm and a subtle taste of the Raj. Latest scientific research shows that, used as a medicine, this wonderful spice not only helps with IBS, but is a powerful protector against stomach cancer.

Practitioners of Indian Ayurvedic medicine have always used it for the treatment of a wide range of digestive problems and it is now known to control the early stages of inflammatory bowel diseases and help to maintain periods of remission.

The natural components of turmeric are one of nature's most powerful anti-inflammatories and although a daily curry is no hardship, it's simpler and you get a more accurate dose by taking a standardised extract of turmeric in tablet form.

TurmericXtra is a new formulation from one of Europe's leading herbal companies, Schwabe Pharma and contains 80mg of standardised extract of turmeric with the added bonus of 50mg artichoke leaf extract too.



Artichoke is one of the most widely researched herbal remedies, and has been used to aid many digestive problems, especially those linked to liver function. A pack of 30 one-a-day tablets costs £7.99 and is stocked in Boots and leading pharmacies and health food stores nationwide. Visit www.turmericxtra.co.uk for more information.

If IBS fails to respond to these simple steps, it will then be necessary to undertake the more complex task of following an exclusion diet. This is best done with the help of a State Registered dietician or a qualified Naturopath.

Exclusion Diet

People do have allergies to specific foods like shellfish, eggs, milk, nuts and strawberries, but most side effects after eating, especially those that happen between one and twenty-four hours later, are caused by food intolerance.

Apart from milk, which is a common problem, other foods which may produce adverse effects include coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, cheese, beer, sausages, some canned foods, yeast, red wine, wheat, and even tomatoes.

As well as IBS, Migraine, asthma, eczema, hives, colitis, Crohn's disease, hay fever, rheumatoid arthritis and menstrual problems are just some which may respond to dietary manipulation.

It might look difficult, but you only need to follow it rigorously for about two weeks, after which foods may be added back, provided you keep a record. You will soon be able to build a list of foods to which you are tolerant and eliminate the others. Stick rigidly to the diet for a fortnight and keep a diary to pinpoint bad reactions. After two weeks things should improve, but if not, food intolerance is probably not your problem so get further medical help.

Start each day with one tablet of TurmericXtra, taken with a small glass of cold, not refrigerated, still mineral water.

The following are the foods which you may and may not eat during the first two weeks of the exclusion diet:

| | Not allowed | Allowed |
|----------------|--|---|
| Meat | preserved meats, bacon, sausages, all processed meat products | all other meats |
| Fish | smoked fish, shellfish | white fish |
| Vegetables | potatoes, onions, sweet corn, aubergine, sweet peppers, chillies, tomatoes | all other vegetables, salads, pulses, Swede and parsnip |
| Fruit | citrus fruit e.g. oranges, grapefruit | all other fruit, e.g. apples, bananas, pears |
| Cereals | wheat, oats, barley, rye, corn | rice, ground rice, rice flakes, rice flour, sago, rice breakfast cereals, tapioca, millet, buckwheat, rice cakes |
| Cooking oils | corn oil, vegetable oil | sunflower oil, Soya oil, safflower oil, olive oil |
| Dairy products | cow's milk, butter, most margarines, cow's milk yoghurt and cheese, eggs | goat, sheep and Soya milk and products made from them, dairy and trans fat-free margarines |
| Beverages | tea, coffee (beans, instant and decaffeinated), fruit squashes, orange juice, grapefruit juice, alcohol and tap water | herbal teas (e.g. camomile), fresh fruit juices (e.g. apple, pineapple), pure tomato juice (without additives), mineral, distilled or deionised water |
| Miscellaneous | chocolates, yeast, yeast extracts, artificial preservatives, colourings and flavourings, monosodium glutamate, all artificial sweeteners | carob, sea salt, herbs, spices, and small amounts of sugar or honey |

After two weeks introduce other foods in this order: Tap water, Potatoes, Cow's milk, Yeast, Tea, Rye, Butter, Onions, Eggs, Porridge Oats, Coffee, Chocolate, Barley, Citrus fruits, Corn, Cow's cheese, White wine, Shellfish, Natural cow's milk yoghurt, Vinegar, Wheat and Nuts.

Only try one new food every two days and if there is a reaction, don't try it again for at least a month.

Carry on with the list when any symptoms stop.

Any diet which is very restricted puts your health at risk and though it's alright to experiment on your own for a few weeks, any long term removal of major food groups should only be done under professional guidance.