

Minimizing Irritable Bowel Syndrome with Herbs and Nutrition

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), otherwise known as spastic colon, is a common disorder plaguing many Canadians; it occurs more frequently in women than men, affecting 1 in 5 adults between the ages of 25 and 45. IBS is characterized by abnormal contractions of smooth muscle lining the digestive tract, causing food and gas to become trapped in the bowel and resulting in changes in bowel movements, abdominal distension, pain, gas and the passing of mucous.

Additional symptoms include: abdominal pain and cramping, constipation or diarrhea or both, food sensitivities, headaches, nausea and vomiting, a sense of incomplete evacuation, weight loss and can often be brought on by stress, anxiety or specific dietary triggers. Unfortunately many individuals with this condition never seek treatment, holistic or otherwise. Treatment is not simply a matter of finding one pill to alleviate the symptoms of IBS, but should address all possible contributing factors, such as stress, diet and lifestyle choices.

General Tips for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, tea and carbonated sodas which aggravate peristaltic movement, increasing cramping of the bowel.
- Take time to enjoy meals, consume food in a calm and relaxed environment, and not while 'on the run'; chew your food until it is liquid before swallowing.
- Consume fresh vegetable juices daily, the live enzymes found in fresh fruit and vegetables play an important role in supporting optimal digestive function; and considering that many individuals with IBS are sensitive to the fiber and roughage found in raw vegetables, fresh vegetable juices are an excellent substitute.
- Avoid animal fats, sugar, all dairy products; chocolate and wheat products, which can further contribute digestive problems and food sensitivities. IBS may be allergic in nature, and is often linked to lactose intolerance and gluten/ wheat sensitivities; eliminating these triggers has helped many people dealing with symptoms of IBS.
- Apply a hot water bottle to the abdomen during periods of cramping and pain for quick relief
- Take steps to minimize stress and incorporate stress management tools into your life, such as daily physical activity and meditation.
- Deep breathing is a simple exercise that assists with stress management, enhancing the feeling of calm and well-being. Take a moment to stop during the day and ensure that you are grounding your body with deep breaths and not shallow breathing.

Support Optimal Digestive Function

- Acidophilus and Essential Fatty Acids, such as flaxseed oil and borage oil, are important for proper digestive function.
- L' Glutamine: an amino acid used as the primary fuel for cells of the intestinal tract, enhances absorption and helps to maintain a healthy intestinal tract.
- Psyllium Husks, a cleansing bulk fiber works to reduce cramping, support muscle contractions and gently assist the movement of food out of the colon. Apples, oat bran and ground flax seed can also be used as gentle bulking agents to promote regularity.
- Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) a medicinal herb with antacid and anti-inflammatory properties, known to help regulate digestive function, offers relief of indigestion, gas and reflux, calms an overactive spastic colon and reduces excess digestive permeability.
- Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) flowers. Anti-inflammatory and carminative herb ideal for mucous membrane irritation, gas and bloating, works to ease digestive cramping and tension related to overtaxed nerves and excess stress.

- Slippery Elm Bark powder (*Ulmus fulva*) a demulcent soothing herb, reduces irritation of the digestive tract and protects the mucous membranes from excess stomach acid, calms down cramping, excessive peristaltic movement and wind, minimizes digestive inflammation, abdominal distension and assists with weight gain in depleted individuals. Slippery elm powder is consumed by mixing with water until it forms a paste and then eaten off the spoon.

Each person with IBS exhibits unique symptoms, which are best treated while under the care of a practitioner trained in botanical therapies. In a clinic environment a practitioner takes into consideration the lifestyle, nutrition and other medications and designs a health program specific to an individual's needs. Most botanical therapies are used in combination rather than singularly and when used in this manner, are most successful in treating the whole person.