

TAKING THE BS OUT OF IBS

By Dr. Stephen P. Weiss

Irritable bowel syndrome is a common and sometimes debilitating condition that affects 30 to 60 million Americans). Symptoms include abdominal cramping, diarrhea, constipation or diarrhea alternating with constipation, bloating, rectal urgency (urgent need to pass stool) which can be severe enough that it results in fecal incontinence (soiling), and excessive mucus in the stool. In Medical School it was referred to as a “wastebasket” diagnosis because there are no specific tests available to diagnose this condition. Instead, other bowel disorders are ruled out that can mimic some of the symptoms of IBS, and if all tests are normal, the patient is labeled with “IBS”. It is especially important to rule out IBD (Inflammatory Bowel Disease)—Ulcerative Colitis and Crohn’s Disease, because these conditions are much more serious and can severely impair health. Crohn’s Disease can cause intermittent bouts of low-grade fever, non-bloody diarrhea, abdominal pain which is commonly located in the right lower belly, weight loss, and obstruction of the small intestine. Fistula formation is also possible (formation of a pathological tract or passageway between the diseased bowel and other organs or the skin often resulting in infection and/or abscess formation). Ulcerative Colitis causes bloody diarrhea, lower abdominal cramping, rectal urgency, anemia and weight loss. It greatly increases the risk of colon cancer in affected patients. One symptom that I have found clinically useful in differentiating between IBS and IBD is nighttime diarrhea. If a patient is frequently awakened from sleep with the urge to defecate, it is usually an indication of bowel inflammation and potentially more serious.

Alternative Medical Practitioners understand that patients labeled with the IBS “diagnosis” are often done a disservice, because they frequently do suffer from a treatable condition that has gone undiagnosed, sometimes for years. Conventional physicians and Gastroenterologists are either unaware of certain specialized tests available to uncover the hidden causes of IBS, or they have decided that some of these causes don’t exist. For example, yeast overgrowth (“Candida” or Candida Related Complex”) is a very common disorder that can present with some or all of the symptoms of IBS, usually as a result of antibiotic use wiping out health-promoting bacteria in the gut which enables Candida, a normal inhabitant of the colon, to multiply and overgrow. I have successfully treated many patients suffering from Candida after diagnosing the condition with either a stool, blood and sometimes even urine test, using either nutritional supplements or pharmaceutical antifungals such as Diflucan, Sporanox or Nystatin in more resistant cases. Yet the medical establishment continues to overlook the very real havoc that Candida wreaks on countless patients, resulting in much unnecessary suffering

There are several other easily treatable conditions which masquerade as “IBS”. These include food allergies, parasites, celiac sprue/gluten intolerance, bacterial overgrowth of the small intestine (BOSI), maldigestion, malabsorption, achlorhydria (inadequate production of hydrochloric acid in the stomach) dysbiosis (disordered bowel

flora without Candida overgrowth), bacterial infections, and many more. Conventional allergists often test for food allergies using scratch tests on the skin, yet this is a very poor test which misses most clinically significant food allergies. With the help of outside labs located all over the country, I am usually able to properly diagnose the problem and provide significant relief or even cure the problem.

The mind-body connection should never be overlooked when treating a patient with “IBS”. Patients know that stress often or even always exacerbates their symptoms, so every effort must be made to pinpoint the stresses in a patient’s life, and either remove them (easier said than done), or help the patient cope using various stress management techniques such as meditation, yoga, exercise, tai chi, breathing exercises etc....Double-blind studies have found hypnosis to be extremely effective in alleviating symptoms, and some hypnotherapists even limit their practice to treating IBS.

BOSI is a little known condition that can easily be missed since its symptoms are identical to those of “IBS”—gas, bloating, diarrhea and abdominal pain. It may be associated with common conditions such as diverticulosis and diabetes, or less common ones such as scleroderma. It is diagnosed with a breath test which quantifies methane and hydrogen gasses produced by the bacteria. One of my patients who was complaining of a 1 year history of foul- smelling loose bowels, gas and bloating was very pleased with the improvement in his condition after I treated him for BOSI. Enteric-coated peppermint oil, touted as a natural treatment, failed to give him any relief, but within 72 hours of starting Cipro, most of his symptoms had cleared up.

Thankfully, more and more physicians are ordering blood tests to diagnose gluten intolerance. This condition, also known as celiac disease or celiac sprue, is a genetic disorder affecting 1% of Americans. The incidence is higher in those of Irish or Scandinavian descent. It is an autoimmune condition that damages the small intestine, causing a host of GI (abdominal pain, bloating, gas, diarrhea, constipation) and non-GI (fatigue, anemia, osteoporosis, inability to gain weight/ underweight, even seizures) symptoms alike. However, most doctors and patients don’t know that blood tests miss a substantial portion of celiac disease. Martha consulted me 16 months ago. Her “IBS” symptoms first started in 1970, went into remission, then recurred in 2003. They had become a chronic, daily nuisance for 15 months. Stomach pain, queasiness, lower abdominal cramping, rectal urgency. “During the day, my intestines are in turmoil”, she lamented. “It is SO frustrating.” Blood tests for gluten intolerance, ordered by another physician, were normal. I sent her stool for extensive testing and diagnosed gluten intolerance as well as Candida overgrowth. Martha’s symptoms quickly and dramatically improved on a strict gluten-free diet along with natural therapies to eradicate Candida.

As in previous articles I’ve written, the most dramatic results are at hands of Lord Homeopathy . I first saw Cara one year ago for severe diarrhea and intolerable nausea of one month’s duration. She had been seen in the ER 3 days prior for dehydration and IV fluids. She was exhausted and had been in bed for days. Her stress level was off the charts. “Feels like everything around me is falling apart. I feel like I’m beginning to fall apart.” After meticulously pinpointing all of her symptoms, I prescribed an obscure

homeopathic remedy for her, Flor de piedra, grown in the tropical rainforests of South America. 48 hours later she returned with the following report:

“ Took first dose of remedy 2 nights ago. It was incredible!!! The nausea was gone in 30 mins. Before I took the remedy, I was suicidal and was thinking of ways to end my life. I have a 357 Magnum in my drawer. Was also thinking.....kitchen knife. I love my husband very much, but I was thinking where to go so my husband wouldn't find me. The depression also completely lifted within 30 mins—it was gone. Only 2 soft bowel movements since yesterday, compared to 3-4 watery movements a day before the remedy. You saved my life---literally.”

The wastebasket analogy for “IBS” is a good one, because the term should rest in peace there alongside other helpful items such as junk mail, great mortgage bargains, and the like.