

Irritable Bowel Syndrome: A Common Disorder Not So Easily Diagnosed

By Martine Carlina

Most people are surprised that they are not alone with symptoms of IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome.) IBS affects up to 20% of the population and is the most commonly diagnosed digestive disorders. IBS is also referred to as spastic colon, mucous colitis, spastic colitis, nervous stomach, or irritable colon.

It is said that one in five North American's suffer from IBS, but fewer than half actually seek a doctor's help for it. Unfortunately many people find the subject to be embarrassing and instead of talking to their doctor, they live with it, often to the detriment of their health. Twice as many women suffer from IBS than men and it affects people primarily between the ages of 25 and 45.

Symptoms of IBS include abdominal pain, bloating, constipation and diarrhea which is often alternating, flatulence, mucus in stools, nausea, and food intolerance. For people with IBS, the pain is often triggered by eating and can sometimes be relieved with a bowel movement. Because of the pain and nausea, vomiting and severe headaches can often result which can make the person fear eating.

Diagnosis of IBS is very difficult and lengthy, as it requires ruling out other disorders that cause similar symptoms. Other disorders that can cause similar symptoms can include Chron's disease, depression, diverticulitis, endometriosis, fecal impaction, food poisoning, infectious diarrhea, lactose intolerance, celiac disease and even colon cancer.

IBS is classified as a functional disorder, which is hard to diagnose by traditional methods. Normally disorders are tested by examinations such as x-ray or blood tests as they result from a biochemical or structural cause. Because IBS is a functional disorder, it is actually an alteration in the physiological function of the way the body works and therefore cannot be tested by traditional means as an inflammatory, infectious, or structural abnormality using the traditional tests. This is why many people go years without proper diagnosis or treatment.

Essential fatty acids (EFA's) are considered very important for people suffering from IBS. They are needed to protect the intestinal lining, reduce inflammation, and restore cellular function. It is important to obtain a balance of essential fats and the most balanced source available on the market today is hempseed oil. Different than flax or fish oils, hempseed oil also contains GLA (gamma-linoleic acid), which is a natural anti-inflammatory and helpful for symptoms of IBS. The dehulled or shelled hempseeds are also full of essential fatty acids and can be added generously to soups, salads, smoothies, dips, and desserts.

Fibre is also extremely important to those with IBS. Fibre helps to regulate the GI tract, ease constipation, and clean toxins from the intestines. Although fibre is very important and obtaining a balance of soluble and insoluble fibre is key, many people with IBS have difficulty consuming vegetable sources of insoluble fiber, as it can cause more gas and pain. A great way to obtain that valuable insoluble fibre is the hemp powder that contains up to 40% fibre, but mostly in difficult to obtain insoluble form. Insoluble fibre is responsible for "scrubbing" the gastrointestinal tract, while increasing the transit time of digested food and regulating blood sugar levels.

Whether or not someone with IBS eats normally, malnutrition can result because nutrients cannot be absorbed properly. Because diarrhea is a problem for those with IBS, those affected should consume up to 30% more protein than those without the disorder and they should also top up on minerals and trace elements because these can also be quickly depleted. In addition to the fibre, the hemp powder is also an excellent protein supplement and will be well received by those with IBS. It can be conveniently mixed or shaken in water or juice for a quick and easy protein/fibre fix. The dehulled or shelled hempseeds are also a tasty source of EFA's and protein.

The most important thing with IBS is talking about it. Without dialogue IBS is still largely undiagnosed and many people live in silent pain. Our intestines and colon are the garbage disposal system of the body. If the garbage is not eliminated properly, it will inevitably affect the rest of the body. If you think you may suffer from IBS, talk to your doctor, family and friends. You most likely will find that you are not alone, and that solutions and treatment are available once you are willing to acknowledge the problem.

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