

Hypnotherapy and the treatment of IBS

Can Hypnosis Ease Chronic IBS Pain? – Bruni Brewin

What the study showed:

Regular sessions of hypnotherapy can markedly ease discomfort and improve the quality of life for most people with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). These were the findings of a 2002 audit carried out at a British hypnotherapy unit devoted solely to the treatment of this common bowel disorder; they were published in *The American Journal of Gastroenterology*.

How it was done...

The research was done at a new IBS Hypnotherapy Unit at the University of South Manchester. The first 250 people treated at the Unit filled out a questionnaire before starting the program and again after three months so that comparisons could be made.

Participants scored themselves on such items as presence and severity of IBS symptoms, quality of life, and level of anxiety and depression. All had suffered from the painful bowel disorder for two years or more and had failed to get real relief from other treatments.

Every week, each participant met with a hypnotherapist. In all, 232 participants continued hypnotherapy and filled out a final set of questionnaires at the end of three months.

The researchers found that bowel habit (such as stool frequency and consistency) improved in 78% of patients. (It did not change in 13%, and it deteriorated slightly in 9%.) Many indicated that their sense of overall well-being soared. Anxiety and depression eased considerably. The only subgroup of participants that did not respond to hypnotherapy were males with diarrhoea. The reviewers could not explain why they improved far less than other patients.

Why it's important...

The university's specialized Hypnotherapy Unit was established in response to indications that hypnosis could make a big difference in the lives of people with IBS, a bowel disorder that causes millions abdominal pain, bloating, and other problems. Many miss weeks of work and are depressed as a result of their illness, and consider their quality of life quite poor.

This large-scale review confirms the wisdom of treating IBS with hypnotherapy. In just three months, symptoms such as pain and bloating, as well as the level of so-called "disease interference" with life, changed profoundly for most participants.

The findings also indicate that a mind-body technique such as hypnotherapy can be very cost-effective (especially compared to pricey medications and surgical interventions), and that relief from this notoriously hard-to-treat condition can be sustainable (improvements are long-lasting).

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