

Study underway to find an alternative cure for Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis

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Two research studies evaluating dietary changes and complementary medicine for the treatment of inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) have been launched at Rush University Medical Center. Funded by the National Institute of Health, one study will look at the impact of mind/body medicine on patients suffering from ulcerative colitis (UC) and the other will assess how diet impacts patients with Crohn's Disease.

There are two main types of IBD, Crohn's disease and UC, which afflict approximately one million Americans. These diseases cause chronic inflammation of the intestinal tract, causing a variety of symptoms such as abdominal pain, diarrhea and rectal bleeding.

"Both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are due to an autoimmune response to the bacteria or bacterial antigens inside the intestines," said Dr. Ali Keshavarzian, director of digestive diseases and nutrition at Rush and principal investigator and co-investigator on the studies. "Basically, the immune system is having an abnormally aggressive reaction to the bacteria."

"We want to control flare-ups of the diseases," said Keshavarzian.

"Unfortunately, the treatments for IBD can be toxic and risky. There are increased risks of cancer, infection and even death as a result of IBD treatment. That's why we're looking at how diet as well as stress relate to the flare-ups. It may be that if we can lower stress and get the right diet, we may be able to control these illnesses."

Mind/Body Alternatives for Treating Ulcerative Colitis

One study is looking for participants suffering from UC in order to find out if complementary and alternative medicine techniques may help reduce the effects when conventional medicine has not been successful.

"We're looking at the relationship between stress and ulcerative colitis flare-ups," said Dr. Sharon Jedel, clinical psychologist in the section of gastroenterology at Rush and the study's co-investigator. "The trial includes education about stress and training individuals in certain stress reduction techniques using alternative therapies."

"Approximately 40 percent of patients with IBD use complementary and alternative medicine; however, there is a lack of scientific evidence of the efficacy," said Keshavarzian. "Complementary treatments and services are a large, yet hidden section of our health care system."

Rush is looking to enroll 100 subjects suffering from moderately severe UC who have experienced a flare-up in the last six months. Participants will be assigned randomly to one of two possible eight-week courses on mind/body medicine.

Research on Diet's Effect on Crohn's Disease

The second study which is a dietary trial is looking for 90 participants with Crohn's disease to see if diet adjustments as well as dietary food supplements promoting the growth of good bacteria might help control flare ups.

"We're trying to get improve the mix of bacteria in the intestines of patients with IBD. Imagine making a picture with different colors," said

Dr. Ece A. Mutlu, gastroenterologist at Rush and principal investigator on the study. "It could be terrible or harmonious depending on the composition and quantity of certain colors. We're trying to create a harmonious environment in the intestines with the right types of bacteria."

"One of the many advantages of coming to Rush is that we're looking for alternatives to IBD treatment that may have less side effects," says Mutlu. "Our hope is to find a number of solutions to control these debilitating diseases."

Source: Rush University Medical Center

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