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Hypnosis provides effective treatment for IBS

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Hypnosis can be a highly effective treatment for the bowel disorder IBS. Studies involving a total of 346 patients conducted by researchers at The Sahlgrenska Academy of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, showed that hypnotherapy alleviated symptoms in 40 per cent of those affected – and that the improvement is long-term.

Around 15 per cent of the Swedish population is thought to suffer from IBS (irritable bowel syndrome), symptoms of which include abdominal pain and alteration of bowel habits, as well as abdominal distension and bloating.

Those with milder symptoms can be helped through lifestyle advice and some medical treatments, but those with severe symptoms currently lack an effective treatment option.

Researchers at The Sahlgrenska Academy have now been able to demonstrate that hypnotherapy provides lasting relief, even for severe symptoms.

Can be used in ordinary healthcare

The treatment of IBS using hypnotherapy has been studied before, but only at highly specialised "hypnotherapy centres". Researcher Magnus Simrén and his colleagues at The Sahlgrenska Academy of Gothenburg University have conducted two studies to evaluate a form of treatment

that could be used in ordinary healthcare.

40 percent showed reduction in symptoms

In one of the studies, which was published in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology*, 138 patients with IBS received hypnotherapy treatment for one hour a week over 12 weeks. The study showed that 40 per cent demonstrated a satisfactory reduction in symptoms, compared with 12 per cent in the untreated control group.

"The treatment involves the patient learning to control their symptoms through deep relaxation and individually adapted hypnotic suggestions. The idea is for the patient to then use this technique in their everyday life," says Magnus Simrén.

The positive effect was sustained for the entire year for which the study ran and led to an improvement in the quality of life experienced by the treatment group.

Long-term effect

In the other study, which was presented in the Scandinavian Journal of Gastroenterology, 208 patients who had previously received hypnotherapy were examined. The results showed that 85 per cent of those who had been helped by hypnosis still felt the benefits of the treatment up to seven years later – and that the majority still actively use the technique in their everyday lives.

Reduce cost for society

"In this group, use of the healthcare system as a result of stomach and bowel symptoms had also reduced by 70 per cent," says Magnus Simrén.

"Overall, our studies show that hypnotherapy is an effective method of treating IBS, even when provided outside of specialist 'hypnotherapy centres'. The conclusion is that hypnotherapy could reduce both the consumption of healthcare and the cost to society, and that hypnosis therefore belongs in the arsenal of treatments for IBS," says Magnus Simrén.

More information: Link to the article "Long-term effects of hypnotherapy in patients with refractory irritable bowel syndrome": bit.ly/H6x9mn
Link to the article "Effects of gut-directed hypnotherapy on IBS in different clinical settings-results from two randomized, controlled trials": bit.ly/yASy1l

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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