

# Effective Treatment for IBS

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Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is an intestinal disorder that may include a variety of symptoms such as: abdominal pain and cramping, nausea, gas, bloating, and irregular bowel movements. IBS sufferers may have diarrhea or frequent loose stools, while others may experience constipation and infrequent bowel movements that are difficult to pass. Still other IBS patients will suffer from alternating diarrhea and constipation. Symptoms are frequently triggered by stress, emotional factors, or food sensitivities.

IBS is the most common gastrointestinal disease seen by family doctors and makes up 30-50% of all referrals to GI specialists. Women are affected three times more than men, with the average age of onset being between 20 and 40 years old. Western medical treatment of IBS involves anti-spasmodic or anti-diarrheal medication, diet modification and stress management techniques.

No one knows why some people develop heightened sensitivities of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, at least in terms of Western medicine, but researchers are working on the theory that there are direct links between the GI tract and the central nervous system.

At least one study has directly investigated the use of acupuncture versus relaxation therapy in IBS patients. This research found that patients' quality-of-life and gastrointestinal symptom scores were equally improved in both groups, with a significant reduction in abdominal pain. However, when the patients were followed for a 4-week post-trial period, only in the acupuncture group did pain reduction persist. Furthermore, a significant reduction in stress perception was also observed in the acupuncture group, but not the relaxation group. The conclusion drawn was that acupuncture is an effective form of treatment for IBS related symptoms of pain and stress, and that its benefits exceed those of standard relaxation treatment.



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An Australian study published in 1998 in the Journal of the American Medical Association lends strong scientific support to treating IBS with Chinese herbs. In this double-blind study, 116 patients with Irritable Bowel Syndrome were divided into three groups. One group was given a standard Chinese herbal preparation, a second group was given customized herbal formulas (individually written for each patient), and a third group was given a placebo. Each patient had regular consultations with both a Chinese herbal medicine practitioner and a gastroenterologist.

Both groups taking the Chinese herbs showed a significant improvement over the patients taking the placebo. In addition, both the patients themselves and the gastroenterologists reported positive results. Although there was improvement in both groups taking the herbs, it is important to note that the positive effects were shown to last longer in the group that was given individualized formulas. Only these patients had maintained improvement on a follow-up consultation 14 weeks after completing the treatment.

Traditional Chinese Medicine is a holistic medical system that combines the use of acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, Tui Na massage, and Chinese medicated diet. Increasingly, it is being used as effective treatment for IBS sufferers.