

# Psychotherapy May Have Lasting Benefits for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

By **Nicholas Bakalar** December 30, 2015 2:28 pm

Psychotherapy is effective in easing the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome, researchers have found, even after therapy has ended.

Irritable bowel syndrome can cause diarrhea, cramping, constipation, bloating and stomach pain. The chronic ailment affects up to 11 percent of the population, and there is no cure or completely effective treatment.

The study, in *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, used data from 41 clinical trials that included 1,183 people assigned to psychotherapy and 1,107 controls. The approach was usually cognitive therapy, but some studies tested hypnotherapy, mindfulness, behavioral therapy or dynamic psychotherapy. The studies all used questionnaires at the start and end of the treatment, asking about severity and frequency of symptoms.

Over all, the researchers found that 12 months after the end of treatment, 75 percent of the treatment group had greater symptom relief than the average member of the control group, although the benefits were modest.

“I.B.S. is notoriously difficult to treat,” said the lead author, Kelsey T.

Laird, a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University, “so the fact that these effects are just as strong six to 12 months later is very exciting — a significant effect, which did not decrease over time.”

Whether a given individual will benefit from psychotherapy is still unknown, Ms. Laird said. But, she added, “We do know that this seems to be one of the best treatments out there. So I would recommend it.”

***Correction: January 13, 2016***

*A report in the In Brief column on Jan. 5 about psychotherapy as a treatment for irritable bowel syndrome erroneously included two symptoms in a list of those caused by the condition. Rectal bleeding and fever are not symptoms. (They may be symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease, a more serious condition.)*

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