

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable bowel syndrome, known as IBS, affects up to one in five people in the UK over the course of their lifetime. Sufferers of IBS can find it debilitating, distressing and very uncomfortable.

Symptoms vary between individuals, but the following physical symptoms and are common with IBS:

- Abdominal pain and discomfort
- Abdominal contractions, spasms or cramps
- Bloating
- Constipation
- Diarrhoea
- Excessive wind
- Indigestion
- Nausea

IBS sufferers may experience a combination of symptoms, frequently with one symptom occurring more regularly or severely. Symptoms may vary from mild, where they do not significantly impair the individual's quality of life, to serious, prompting them to seek medical help. In addition to the physical symptoms, people may also become anxious, depressed, or become socially isolated as a consequence of their condition.

IBS is diagnosed by doctors by eliminating any other medical reason for the symptoms. Those diagnosed with IBS will be given dietary advice and may be put on medication to reduce the symptoms. Some are offered talking therapies such as CBT on the NHS. Symptoms can be exacerbated by anxiety or stress and worrying about IBS can prolong and perpetuate the symptoms. Hypnotherapy may get to any emotional triggers and most therapists will work with clients to reduce any stress that may make the IBS worse. By using positive suggestion, hypnotherapy could lessen anxiety and increase confidence and wellbeing; this is believed to reduce sensitivity in the gut.

Peter Whorwell, Professor of Medicine & Gastroenterology at the University of Manchester, has investigated the application of hypnotherapy to manage and treat IBS since the 1980s. His pioneering research demonstrates that over 60% of IBS sufferers who undertake hypnotherapy see long-term improvement and even the complete disappearance of symptoms, often with no recurrence.

Thanks largely to Professor Whorwell, hypnotherapy is now acknowledged within the medical profession as an evidenced-based therapy that can help alleviate the symptoms of IBS. The National Institute for Clinical and Care Excellence (NICE) lists hypnotherapy as one of the treatments to help with IBS.

How long do sessions continue?

Evidence shows that 6 x one-hour sessions of hypnotherapy works well, with the opportunity to have follow-up sessions in the future. The hypnotherapist will monitor progress on a session-by-session basis and make recommendations accordingly.

What can I expect?

Not every therapist will take the same approach, but treatment for IBS will generally include:

- Visualisation for the desired outcome when you are free of symptoms
- Processing any worries or fears that may be contributing to the IBS
- Visualisation and suggestions to decrease gut sensitivity and to increase wellbeing
- To learn self-hypnosis
- An audio recording to listen to use between sessions

What should I tell my doctor?

The hypnotherapist will take details of your condition and your hopes for the treatment, and will ask if you have seen a doctor and had tests to rule out any other issues. Once a medical diagnosis of IBS has been confirmed the hypnotherapist may recommend you inform your GP that you intend to undertake hypnotherapy.