

UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

Dedicated to increasing knowledge about safe and effective complementary and integrative medicine approaches.

Integrative Approaches to Functional GI Problems

By Deanna Burkett, Sari Cohen, Deborah Grice Conway, Carol Greco, Ronald Glick, John Laird, Janet McKee, Sharon Plank, Kate Sherman, Patricia Smith, Gregory Thorkelson

Patients seeking out complementary therapies typically experience two issues: 1) they have bothersome or disabling conditions, and 2) they have been frustrated in finding the cause or an effective solution. We see this frequently among individuals with primary gastro-intestinal (GI) or bowel complaints. They may be diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or another functional GI disorder. The latter term implies that there is no specific treatable condition such as Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis. Patients may interpret the labeling as psychological, which is in sharp contrast to their experience. “My pain, cramping, and diarrhea are real. It’s in my belly not in my head.” are comments we hear.

When we see patients with these conditions at the Center for Integrative Medicine, we employ a holistic approach. Our goal is to engage the person in activities that can help manage symptoms, and move away from finding “the cause.” An integrative approach encompasses dietary and nutritional changes, mind-body approaches, psychological orientation, and other systems of care such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Considerations include:

Hypnosis: The use of medical hypnosis in the treatment of GI conditions is well-supported in clinical research.¹⁻⁴ Although the image of hypnosis is still colored by the distortions of entertainers, it’s accepted by the medical community. The procedure works paradoxically by inducing a state of relaxation at the same time as highly focused attention. While in this enhanced state of receptivity, verbal suggestions and imagery are used to encourage the improvement of symptoms. Hypnosis treatment for functional GI disorders usually consists of a course of 6 to 12 therapy sessions. In addition, patients are commonly asked to practice self-hypnosis at home between visits, with the aid of audio recordings.

Yoga and Mindfulness Practice: Yoga can aid digestion, encourage relaxation, and help individuals learn new ways of relating to the body.^{5,6} One example of yoga in the GI context involves gently moving the spine through its range of motion. This motion naturally massages the abdomen, offering expansion and contraction of this region, much like the movements of digestion. Another common yoga pose, “Downward Dog,” may help the conveyor belt in the GI system to move. Stress often is a contributing factor to GI disorders.

Yoga, when practiced with an emphasis on awareness and self-care, can be an effective approach to stress reduction. Mindfulness involves the cultivation of intentional, non-judgmental, present-moment awareness. Learning to sustain quality of awareness may reduce stress and GI symptoms.⁷

Acupuncture can be helpful for treatment of GI dysfunction.⁸ Acupuncture has been shown to calm spasms of the digestive tract and reduce stress. It can trigger the body’s own anti-inflammatory response, which can help quiet inflammation and pain. This can help for pain and other symptoms in Crohn’s disease, IBS, and other GI disorders. In the TCM system, health problems may be caused by an excess or blockage of energy within specific organ system meridians, such as the large intestine or spleen. Acupuncture needles placed in specific points along these channels can help restore balance in the system and have a calming effect on the gut.

Shiatsu: Shiatsu, a bodywork therapy of Asia, uses finger pressure to diagnose and treat the flow of energy in the body. In acupuncture practice, feeling the pulses on one’s wrists provides information about organ function. In the same way, the shiatsu practitioner palpates the abdomen to assess the organ channels and their quality and quantity of energy. Relief of acute digestive issues is reported by many clients after a single treatment. Shiatsu appears to impact directly on digestive organs and balances the flow of energy in the body. Shiatsu seeks to improve the overall health of the body, including the digestive system. This may allow chronic conditions, such as GI issues, to be relieved by this supportive therapy.⁹

Probiotics: Integrative medicine recognizes the importance of the microbiome, the bacterial cast of characters who live in our bodies. Certain organisms contribute to health problems, while other microbes in probiotics may prevent and treat those disorders. Women have long known about this, eating yogurt after a course of antibiotics to prevent a yeast infection. Research supports the benefit of Lactobacillus GG, a healthy bacteria derived from yogurt cultures, during pregnancy and infancy, to prevent eczema in infants and children.¹⁰ Lactobacillus GG [Culturelle] and Saccharomyces boulardii [Florastor] prevent antibiotic associated diarrhea in infants.¹¹ The probiotic, Bifidobacterium infantis [Align] significantly reduces abdominal pain, bloating, and bowel difficulties in individuals with IBS.¹² While it sounds disquieting, fecal

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Integrative Approaches to Functional GI Problems

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transplant, putting healthy organisms directly into a person's bowels, may be more effective than antibiotics for treatment-resistant *Clostridium difficile* colitis, also known as C-Diff.¹³

Understanding Inflammation: To make sense of the myriad symptoms that accompany GI conditions, researchers describe what is called the brain-gut axis. This may help explain the connection between bowel problems and psychological symptoms such as depression, anxiety, or fatigue. Conditions such as Crohn's disease and IBS involve this connection between the brain and intestines. Inflammation may be partly to blame for these symptoms and a large part of the body's immune system is housed within the gut. Patients who have had a severe flu infection may experience the impact of chemical messengers of inflammation on mood, energy, and well-being. Inflammation appears to worsen depression and anxiety symptoms. At the same time, worsening mood can negatively alter the course of health conditions such as IBS and inflammatory bowel disease. Mind-body therapies, dietary changes, herbs and supplements, and acupuncture all may help decrease inflammation as well as break this cycle at its source.

Elimination-Challenge Diet: Digestive problems are often triggered by certain foods. Patients may have difficulty pinning down which foods are the culprits. A holistic practitioner can help a client identify food intolerances by guiding them on an elimination-challenge diet.¹⁴ This involves cutting out many foods from the diet for a limited period of time until symptoms dissipate. Then, an individual adds specific foods back to his or her diet, one at a time (for example: wheat, milk, and tomato separately, rather than a slice of pizza) to best observe the reaction(s). Identification of food intolerance is a cornerstone of naturopathic medicine and can help a number of disease conditions beyond digestive disorders. It's common for patients to report observations like, "not only is my IBS better, but so are my headaches and fatigue."

What you can do to help manage GI symptoms: We hope this article provides information about some of the approaches that are available. Specific suggestions that may be especially helpful include:

Stress management: Find something that you can do every day to help to manage your stress levels.

Clean up your diet: Shift away from processed foods, simple carbs, and high-fat foods, all of which may stimulate inflammation in the gut and elsewhere. On the flip side, eat more anti-inflammatory foods such as green leafy vegetables, garlic, ginger, turmeric, and foods high in omega-3 fats such as flax, walnuts, and chia seeds. Also, certain wild fish such as salmon, cod, and sardines, are excellent sources of omega-3 fats.

Consider seeing a naturopathic physician or holistic health practitioner: Practitioners knowledgeable in holistic aspects of nutrition and lifestyle can guide you on making dietary changes less painful. Also, they can help support a person through an elimination diet and counsel about probiotics and other ways to help heal the gut.

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Research Opportunities

HEAL Study

When you work with a health care provider, what contributes to improved health?

Is it the attitude and behavior of the patient? The expertise and caring of the health care provider? Is it acupuncture needles, medications, or a combination of these treatments?

Center for Integrative Medicine researchers Carol Greco, PhD; Ronald Glick, MD; Michael Schneider, DC, PhD, and their team are hoping, with your help, to learn more about the important factors that help people to heal. The University of Pittsburgh has received funding from the National Institutes of Health-National Centers for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, to study patients' ideas about what helps them to improve their health. The overall goal of the **HEAL Study**, is to develop and test questionnaires to measure the important contextual factors in treatment from the patient's perspective.

Who can participate in the HEAL Study?

People with back pain or neck pain who receive services at the Center for Integrative Medicine may be eligible to participate if they:

- are starting treatment at the Center for Integrative Medicine.
- expect to continue the treatment with their CIM provider for at least several weeks.
- are able to read and understand English.
- are willing and able to complete questionnaires on a computer.

Participants will be asked to complete computer-based questionnaires regarding their attitudes and opinions about their healthcare. Each of three sessions will require 30 minutes to 1 hour. The computer assessments will take place approximately one month apart and can be completed at CIM or at any location with internet access. Participants will be paid up to \$100.

For more information please call 412-623-2374

PRIMIER

Patients Receiving Integrative Medicine Interventions
Effectiveness Registry

Help advance Integrative Medicine by participating
in the **PRIMIER** study.

The UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine is one of 14 integrative medicine clinics across the US participating in PRIMIER – the first large-scale national project to evaluate patients experiences with integrative medicine. PRIMIER's goal is to better understand the types of integrative medicine interventions patients are receiving, clinical outcomes, and quality of life. This large database will help provide information to evaluate the effectiveness of integrative medicine for many medical conditions.

Please participate in this important study!

- All persons receiving services at the Center for Integrative Medicine are eligible
- The study involves online questionnaires only – you can participate from home
- You will be asked to complete up to 7 questionnaires over a period of 2 years
- Each questionnaire takes about 20 minutes to complete



“...we are faced with a quandary. We believe that integrative medicine services enhance clinical care and outcomes and likely can provide cost savings. Unfortunately, these services are largely self-pay and beyond the resources of many patients. The only way this will change is through documentation of the efficacy, effectiveness, and economic benefit.” – Ron Glick, MD, CIM Medical Director

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2014 Lectures and Classes at the UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine

UPMC Employees receive 75 Take a Healthy Step points for attending. All lectures and classes at CIM.

November 2014

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|---------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-------|----------------------------|
| Mon. 11/3 & 11/10 Mon. 12/1 & 12/8 | 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. | Mindful Yoga (4 classes) | \$50 | Deanna Burkett, MA,MS,RYT |
| Mon. 11/3 - 11/24 | 3:30 - 5:00 p.m. | Yoga Level 2 (4 classes) | \$50 | Alicja W. Walczak, MS, CRS |
| Mon. 11/3 - 11/24 | 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. | Yoga Level 1 (4 classes) | \$50 | Alicja W. Walczak, MS, CRS |
| Wed. 11/5 - 11/26 | 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. | Yoga Level 1 (4 classes) | \$50 | Alicja W. Walczak, MS, CRS |
| Tues. 11/18 - 1/21 | 5:00 - 6:00 p.m. | Level 1 Tai Chi (10 classes) | \$100 | Joseph Bozzelli |
| Tues 11/18 - 1/21 | 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. | Level 2 Tai Chi (10 classes) | \$100 | Joseph Bozzelli |
| Thurs. 11/20 | 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. | Healthy Aging | FREE | Sari Cohen, ND |

December 2014

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| | | No new events | | |
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January 2015

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|-------------|------------------|----------------------|------|--|
| Thurs. 1/15 | 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. | Fascia-nating Fascia | FREE | David Lesondak, BCSI Structural Integration |
|-------------|------------------|----------------------|------|--|

UPMC Center for Integrative Medicine Team

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