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ASK THE DOC

of the intestines

LEARN HOW TO
RELIEVE IRRITABLE
BOWEL SYNDROME
NATURALLY

By Frank Ervolino, ND

To help my irritable bowel, I started following a diet of no dairy and
no wheat on the advice of a local naturopath. For almost a year,
I drank soymilk and ate no wheat whatsoever—and it worked. But
about three months ago, the bloating and the constipation returned.
Now I'm wondering if the soymilk has become a problem. How can
I get my digestive system back in balance?

In cases like this, it's often my preference to use traditional
Chinese medicine (TCM). TCM may offer relief to some who suffer
irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), according to a September 2001
University of Western Sydney study.
ASK THE DOC

TCM treatments usually involve a combination of herbs that are individually tailored to the patient's symptoms, but there are other TCM dietary principles that you can practice on your own that may help.

In Chinese, qi (pronounced "chee") means the underlying strength and energy of a bodily system. IBS is a sign of disharmony between the liver and the spleen, according to Chinese medical literature, and indicates a weakened spleen qi. So you will want to work toward strengthening yours.

Enzymes increase your spleen qi. I would start supplementing with a digestive enzyme. These make sure that carbohydrates (which tend to make up the bulk of your diet) are adequately digested. I use Renew Life’s Gas Stop enzyme. I would also use a probiotic supplement to ensure you have the right digestive bacteria in your intestines. Poor dietary habits, stress and antibiotics can encourage growth of bad intestinal bacteria; supplementing with probiotics can encourage a healthy bacteria population in your gut. I like Renew Life’s Flora Smart for a probiotic.

Another way to strengthen the spleen qi is diet. The kinds of foods that you should incorporate into your diet are whole grains (not processed or ground into flour), whole vegetables, fresh nuts and lean proteins. How you prepare your food can also help. Eat only cooked foods and not raw, which are harder to digest. By cooked I mean steamed, baked or lightly sautéed, not fried. Avoid heavy sweets, and drink hot teas—herbal or regular. And while you are at it, follow your instincts and stay away from soymilk, which can be an allergen. Use rice or almond milk instead. And be conscious of portions: Make breakfast your largest meal of the day, then eat a substantial lunch and a light dinner, such as soup and a vegetable on the side.

For constipation relief, you may want to rely on the water-soluble fiber found in fruits and vegetables, which remains in the food even after it is cooked. Also, stay away from large amounts of insoluble fiber, such as bran fiber, since it tends to increase the frequency, water content and looseness of bowel movements. While this helps prevent colon cancer, the gas and cramps this causes IBS sufferers are painful. For a small dose of insoluble fiber, try using a mixture of ground flaxseeds, hemp seeds and black sesame seeds (available at Asian food markets) sprinkled on your food. Taking the above actions may help alleviate your symptoms of IBS.

Bloating can make the thinnest person feel fat.
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