

# Is Your Bowel Really “Irritable”?

By Dr. Arjuna Veeravagu, ND RAc

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a diagnosis being given with increasing frequency to patients who experience chronic digestive symptoms. The condition is characterized most commonly by intermittent cramping, abdominal pain, bloating, constipation and diarrhea. It occurs more commonly in women and is thought to occur in as many as 20% of the Canadian population. The diagnosis of IBS simply refers to the symptoms listed above. It does not offer any insight as to why the symptoms are occurring. There are significant underlying causes discussed below that should be evaluated in all patients suffering from IBS.

## Food Allergies and Intolerances

Both IBS patients and researchers agree that food allergies and intolerances can be major triggers of IBS symptoms. However, adverse food reactions are rarely assessed and identified in IBS patients. Because these reactions can be delayed from several hours to days after the ingestion of an offending food, the connection between the food and resultant symptoms can be difficult to identify. Naturopathic physicians offer several options for food sensitivity assessment, including blood testing for delayed food allergies, energetic (Vega) testing, and elimination/reintroduction diet guidance.


## Intestinal Imbalances (“Dysbiosis”)

Dysbiosis is a term used in naturopathic medicine to describe an imbalance in the normal mix of microorganisms (called “flora”) in the intestinal tract. Alterations in the intestinal flora include overgrowths of yeast, parasites and bacteria or deficiencies of healthy bacteria. They can be present in IBS patients for years. An abnormal increase in the yeast *Candida albicans* is very common and can be triggered by antibiotic use or a high carbohydrate and sugar intake. A detailed diet, medication and travel history along with specialized stool test-

ing can help naturopathic physicians identify the exact type of intestinal imbalance present. Treatment of dysbiosis includes herbal remedies to eradicate harmful microorganisms and probiotic supplements to replenish beneficial bacteria.

## Stress-Induced Adrenal Imbalances

Another trigger of IBS that is well agreed upon is stress. Many people experience a clear increase in digestive symptoms when stress levels rise. Chronic elevations in stress levels can lead to imbalances in the function of our adrenal glands, which can trigger a vicious cycle that further diminishes our stress tolerance. Undiagnosed adrenal imbalances can be a significant contributing factor to IBS symptoms and can be readily assessed through saliva testing of the adrenal hormone cortisol.

Before a patient’s bowel is diagnosed as “irritable” the above potential triggers should be evaluated. Treatment of these underlying causes is often simple, potentially short term, and may lead to significant improvement in symptoms associated with IBS. 

**Seminar: If you want to learn more, Dr. Veeravagu will be holding a seminar on IBS on Wednesday, May 30, 2007, 7:00-8:30pm at the Canadian Memorial Centre for Peace, 1825 W. 16th Ave, Vancouver. See event calendar for registration information.**

### References:

- About Irritable Bowel Syndrome. US NIH Publication No. 03-4686, April 2003.
- Galland, Leo MD. Intestinal Dysbiosis and the Causes of Disease, 2003.
- Yarnell, Eric ND. Naturopathic Gastroenterology, Healing Mountain Publishing, 2000.



*Dr. Arjuna Veeravagu is a naturopathic physician, registered acupuncturist and founder of Sage Clinic in Yaletown. To schedule a consultation please email [info@sageclinic.com](mailto:info@sageclinic.com) or call (604) 697-0397; visit [www.sageclinic.com](http://www.sageclinic.com) for more information.*