

You don't have to learn to live with IBS

Local physician offer solutions to the most common causes of an irritable bowel

By Cathy Herholdt

An estimated 25 million people in the United States and up to 20 percent of the world's population suffer from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Dr. Stephen Wangen, founder of the IBS Treatment Center in Seattle believes those figures are conservative and that the number of U.S. sufferers could be as high as 50 million.

While the symptoms of IBS—abdominal pain, bloating, gas, heartburn, constipation, diarrhea, indigestion, or any combination of these—are common, they are not normal, says Dr. Wangen in his book *The Irritable Bowel Syndrome Solution*. "Poor digestion and the symptoms that make up IBS are more common than any other ailment known," he writes. "Far too often these symptoms are accepted as normal."

Wangen has successfully treated numerous patients with IBS, many of whom had been attempting to manage their symptoms with medication, increased fiber in their diet or stress reduction. He says that many of his patients received little more than a diagnosis from their doctor. "A diagnosis tells them nothing more than they already know," he said. "They already knew their bowel irritated them."

As a graduate of Bastyr University, Dr. Wangen believes in the importance of finding the specific cause of IBS for each individual in order to cure patients of their illness. "The single biggest impact on our health is our environment," he explained.

The most common causes of IBS, according to Wangen, are food allergies, bacteria, yeast and parasites. Extensive tests to determine which of these is causing a patient's

discomfort are the first order of business.

Food allergies are much more common than most people suspect, says Dr. Wangen. Differing from intolerances, such as the inability to digest lactose, food allergies are a response of the immune system to a certain food. Blood tests indicate which specific foods are the culprits by measuring antibodies produced in response to certain foods. Some of the most problematic foods he sees are dairy, eggs, wheat/gluten, bananas, cane sugar, peanuts, sesame and pineapple, but patients are tested for over 100 possible foods.

Attempting to self-diagnose a food allergy is almost impossible because there is such a long list of possible offenders, and it's difficult to eliminate trace amounts of certain food from your diet.

After determining the cause of an indi-

vidual's IBS, he or she must learn to address that specific cause, either by treating the bacteria or parasite, or by eliminating the offending food(s) from their diet. He works closely with patients to help them adjust their diet to eliminate whatever they're allergic to.

"I expect a huge majority of my patients to figure out what causes their IBS and to resolve it," said Wangen. "Very often it's dietary, but the other part is looking at the eco-system of the digestive system."

"What I like to see is good, objective science," he said of the diagnostic testing. "I enjoy what I do. We have great success and it's very rewarding."

For more information, visit www.ibstreatmentcenter.com.

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