Long-term effects of hypnotherapy in patients with refractory irritable bowel syndrome.

Lindfors P, Unge P, Nyhlin H, Ljótsson B, Björnsson ES, Abrahamsson H, Simrén M.

Abstract

OBJECTIVE:
Gut-directed hypnotherapy is considered to be an effective treatment in irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) but few studies report the long-term effects. This retrospective study aims to evaluate the long-term perceived efficacy of gut-directed hypnotherapy given outside highly specialized hypnotherapy centers.

METHODS:
208 patients, who all had received gut-directed hypnotherapy, were retrospectively evaluated. The Subjective Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) was used to measure changes in IBS symptoms, and patients were classified as responders and non-responders. Patients were also asked to report changes in health-care seeking, use of drugs for IBS symptoms, use of alternative non-pharmacological treatments, and if they still actively used hypnotherapy.

RESULTS:
Immediately after hypnotherapy, 103 of 208 patients (49%) were responders and 75 of these (73%) had improved further at the follow-up 2-7 years after hypnotherapy (mean 4 years). A majority of the responders still used hypnotherapy on a regular basis at follow-up (73%), and the responders reported a greater reduction in health-care seeking than non-responders. A total of 87% of all patients reported that they considered gut-directed hypnotherapy to be worthwhile, and this differed between responders and non-responders (100% vs. 74%; p < 0.0001).

CONCLUSION:
This long-term follow-up study indicates that gut-directed hypnotherapy in refractory IBS is an effective treatment option with long-lasting effects, also when given outside highly specialized hypnotherapy centers. Apart from the clinical benefits, the reduction in health-care utilization has the potential to reduce the health-care costs.

PMID: 22339617
[PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]