Where does hypnotherapy stand in the management of irritable bowel syndrome? A systematic review.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:
Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a gastrointestinal disorder characterized by chronic abdominal pain and altered bowel habits in the absence of any organic cause. Despite its prevalence, there remains a significant lack of efficient medical treatment for IBS to date. However, according to some previous research studies, hypnosis has been shown to be effective in the treatment of IBS.

AIM:
To determine the definite efficacy of hypnosis in the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome.

METHODS:
A systematic review of the literature on hypnosis in the treatment of IBS from 1970 to 2005 was performed using MEDLINE. Full studies published in English were identified and selected for inclusion. We excluded case studies and those studies in which IBS symptoms were not in the list of outcome measures. All studies were reviewed on the basis of the Rome Working Team recommendations for design of IBS trials.

RESULTS:
From a total of 22 studies, seven were excluded. The results of the reviewed studies showed improved status of all major symptoms of IBS, extracolonic symptoms, quality of life, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore these improvements lasted 2-5 years.

CONCLUSIONS:
Although there are some methodologic inadequacies, all studies show that hypnotherapy is highly effective for patients with refractory IBS, but definite efficacy of hypnosis in the treatment of IBS remains unclear due to lack of controlled trials supporting this finding.

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