

Kathryn Francis

Heaven on Earth Yoga Institute  
Yoga Therapy Training  
May 10, 2011

## Yoga Therapy for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

### Summary

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a gastrointestinal disorder that afflicts nearly one out of every five adults in America, and results in one out of every ten visits to the doctor<sup>1</sup>. It is a functional bowel disorder that is distinguished by a set of symptoms including abdominal cramping, chronic diarrhea and/or constipation, flatulence and bloating. The age of onset is typically between 25 and 45 years. As symptoms are typically managed with a combination of diet, stress management and lifestyle, Yoga Therapy can be an effective healing modality to help in the relief of IBS symptoms as well as the root causes of the disorder.

### Background

IBS is a disorder of the function of the intestine, and is usually diagnosed after tests have been performed to rule out serious and inflammatory conditions with similar symptoms, including Celiac disease, Crohn's, ulcerative colitis, colon cancer, diverticulitis, endometriosis, fecal impaction, and food poisoning. The diagnostic tools used to rule out these other conditions include colonoscopy and flexible sigmoidoscopy tests which use tubes to examine the colon, and computerized tomography (CT) scans of the abdomen and pelvis. Less invasive tests are also used such as blood tests to check for anemia or celiac disease and lactose intolerance tests. Once more serious conditions have been ruled out, the doctor may then diagnose irritable bowel syndrome based on the patient's history and frequency of symptoms, and the absence of other symptoms such as blood in the stool and weight loss. It is important to note that the

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mayoclinic.org/irritable-bowel-syndrome/>

presence of IBS does not predispose a person to developing more serious bowel diseases or cancer. However, the systemic effects of IBS have been linked to over a hundred different disorders, including candidiasis, malabsorption, and parasitic infections. Interestingly, 25% of adults with IBS also suffer from arthritis. Usually the arthritis affects the peripheral joints – the ankles, knees and wrists, but occasionally the spine is affected.

The exact cause of IBS is still unknown and may vary from person to person. In a healthy individual, the muscles of the intestine contract and relax rhythmically, a process called peristalsis, to push food through the intestine. This is normally an involuntary action controlled by the parasympathetic division of the autonomic nervous system. Symptoms occur when these muscles contract in an irregular pattern. When one part of the intestine contracts and the area below it does not react, this can cause abdominal cramping and pain. Some doctors believe that the intestinal wall muscles in some sufferers may be extra sensitive, resulting in painful sensations even during normal digestion. There have been studies showing a “brain-gut” connection where the brain interprets nerve signals from the gut as painful. Other research studies have linked a genetic component to IBS, and still other studies have found a link between symptoms and bacterial infections in the intestine. The latest studies indicate that IBS symptoms have developed in people following intestinal infections (post infectious IBS). A research study performed on 5,894 patients found that the risk of IBS in individuals with gastroenteritis, an inflammation of the GI tract commonly caused by infection, was double that of the control group. The risk increased significantly in patients with stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and those who were on antibiotics for longer periods. (Ruigomez A, 2007)

Researchers have also found links between IBS, an imbalance of gut flora in the intestines, and food intolerances. Flora imbalances may cause abnormal fermentation of food in the intestines, thus leading to food intolerances and IBS symptoms. Some IBS sufferers have reported improvements in symptoms after identifying food intolerances and making diet changes. Several research studies have indicated that

probiotics are safe and effective in managing the symptoms of diarrhea and constipation, although further study is required to determine what types and combinations of probiotics should be used. (Hunter, 2002) (Gastroenterology, 2008)

Generally, patients are diagnosed with one of three types of IBS. All types may include symptoms of abdominal cramping, bloating, flatulence, and mucus in the stool. IBS D is characterized by chronic diarrhea, IBS C patients experience chronic constipation, and IBS A sufferers alternate between both constipation and diarrhea. Sufferers may also experience other symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and fatigue.

IBS occurs in women more than in men due to hormonal changes. Factors that have been found to increase the frequency or severity of symptoms include fatty foods, caffeine, intolerant foods, elevated stress, heavy meals, and menstruation (for women). Common triggers are individual to each person.

There is no general cure for IBS, but patients usually find relief of symptoms using diet changes and management of stress. When necessary, medication is prescribed. Side effects such as depression may also need to be treated. The Mayo Clinic recommends gradually increasing fibre, avoiding problematic foods (chocolate, caffeine, sodas, dairy, sugar-free sweeteners, fatty foods), eating regular meals, reduction or elimination of dairy, increasing liquids and regular exercise. If necessary, medications to control constipation, diarrhea, intestinal spasms, and depression may be prescribed. Effective management of stress is necessary, as it is a major trigger for IBS symptoms. Stress management techniques employed at the Mayo Clinic (Irritable Bowel Syndrome Treatment) include Yoga and breath work, massage and counselling.

Stress activates the sympathetic nervous system, also known as the "fight or flight" response. When our brain perceives that we are in danger or distress, it will automatically decrease energy to the parasympathetic system, which is responsible for our relaxation response, and increase the energy used for the sympathetic system. As the parasympathetic system controls the peristalsis action necessary to keep food

moving in the intestines smoothly, it is logical that prolonged periods of stress will negatively affect the gastrointestinal system and trigger or worsen IBS symptoms.

A comprehensive Yoga Therapy program involving yoga exercise, meditation, stress reduction, diet and lifestyle recommendations can be a very effective tool in managing the symptoms of IBS. Stress reduction is a major benefit of any yoga practice and is a crucial part of any IBS relief program. The Yoga Therapy recommendations outlined in this paper are for relieving the mental-emotional aspect as well as the collective and individual physical symptoms of IBS. A variety of different therapies are described, enabling the practitioner or sufferer to pick those that resonate with their particular lifestyle.

### Yoga Therapy: Strengthening the Chakra Focal Point

As IBS symptoms affect the intestines and digestive system, according to Yogic philosophy the cause may be attributed to a blocked 3<sup>rd</sup> chakra, known as *Manipura* in the Sanskrit language, located above the navel. The navel or solar chakra, as it is commonly called, is associated on the mental-emotional plane with issues of self-empowerment, self-esteem, confidence and control. Some of the signs of an imbalance in this area include struggling to freely express emotions, insomnia, anxiety, sensitivity to criticism, difficulty achieving goals and weight problems or eating disorders. On the physical plane, the solar chakra affects the autonomic nervous system and the digestive system. The conditions commonly associated with it include digestive system disorders, stomach problems/ailments, ulcers, nervous disorders, weight problems, eating disorders, and diseases of the liver, spleen and gallbladder. Therapies recommended for clearing blockages and strengthening the solar chakra include yoga postures, aromatherapy, gemstones and plants.

Gemstones to strengthen the solar chakra include citrine, tiger's eye, amber, yellow jasper and chrysoberyl. Gemstones may be worn as a pendant or a ring, or loose touchstones (amber and tiger's eye) can be held in the hand. Alternatively, gemstones (citrine and chrysoberyl) can be placed directly on the skin above the area

of the solar chakra during meditation. For aromatherapy, a few drops of essential oils of lavender, anise, lemon or chamomile can be added to a lamp, mixed with base oil (sesame or jojoba) for massage, or placed in a warm bath. Healing plants for the solar chakra are juniper (mix berries with wine), chamomile and fennel (use as teas).

The following yoga posture sequence for the solar/navel chakra is adapted from "A Handbook of Chakra Healing" (Govinda, 2002).

### Yoga Postures for Solar/Navel Chakra

#### 1. Warm-up:

Corpse pose (Savasana)

Backward Rolls

- Massages the spine and helpful for back pain or stiffness.
- Sit on the ground with legs together and knees bent, hands behind them. Lift feet and rock gently back and forth, then roll all the way back so upper back touches the ground, and then forward again. Repeat several times.

Cat and Cow (Marjaryasana and Bitilasana)

- Stimulates all the chakras and improves spinal flexibility, massages spinal and belly organs, therapeutic for stress.
- Come down on all fours, hands shoulder width apart and knees below hips. Inhale and lift the head and tailbone gently upward, then exhale and drop the chin to the chest as you arch your back upward. Repeat several times.

Neck Rolls

- Releases tension and relaxes neck and shoulder muscles.

- Sit comfortably and inhale as you gently tilt head up, then exhale chin to chest. Repeat several times, and then repeat turning head left and right.

#### Butterfly (Baddha Konasana)

- Increases leg flexibility and activates root and sacral chakras.
- Sit and pull feet towards you, knees bent. Flutter the legs up and down like butterfly wings. Stretch out and shake legs to loosen them.

#### Hip Circles

- Increases hip flexibility and stimulates root and sacral chakras. Strengthens kundalini and upward energy flow.
- Feet are shoulder-width apart, hands on hips. Start clockwise with small circles then enlarge with each rotation. Switch directions. Lie on back to rest.

All the remaining postures described below strengthen the Solar chakra. Concentrate on the Solar chakra while holding them.

#### 2. Single Wind-Relieving Pose (Pavanmuktasana)

- Lie flat on back, and exhale as you bring your right knee to your chest, hold and breathe deeply for a few breaths. Release and switch sides.

#### 3. Intensive Eastern Stretch/Upward Plank Pose (Purvottanasana)

- Sit with legs outstretched in front, then place hands on ground under shoulders, fingers pointing back. Lift hips with straight legs as toes extend towards the ground.

#### 4. Bow (Dhanurasana)

- Lie on stomach, legs hip width apart. Bend knees and hold on feet or ankles with hands. Inhale lift head and legs up.

### 5. Abdominal Lift

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart. Inhale, and then on the exhale draw the walls of the abdomen inward and hold.

### 6. Navel/Solar Chakra Meditation

- In a sitting position, place the palms together, the right thumb over the left and tucked inside the palms. This mudra energetically activates the solar chakra.
- Inhale, and on the exhale intone the mantra RAM seven times. Repeat the entire cycle seven times while concentrating on the solar chakra.

### 7. Closing Relaxation

- Gradually tighten and release every muscle in the body.
- Stimulate and balance the energy flow to the solar chakra by visualizing a ball of yellow light above the area that grows larger and larger and radiates outward.

Colon disorders are also related to the Root chakra, *Manipura*, so any therapy to strengthen it or to help balance the emotions associated with it will also be beneficial. These emotions include fear, lack of groundedness, and the need for support and security.

### Yoga Therapy: Nutrition for IBS

Nutritional therapies for IBS include eating foods with nutrients that improve gastrointestinal health and improve digestion, and identifying possible diet triggers. The following chart lists nutrient recommendations and food sources. The most important nutrients for promoting intestinal health include essential fatty acids, B vitamins and L-glutamine. Essential fatty acids help to protect the intestinal lining as well as lubricate the system and are present in flaxseed oil, evening primrose oil and fatty fish. If you choose to take them in supplement form, follow the directions on the label. A B vitamin complex in supplement form is recommended for muscle tone in the

intestine. Vitamin B12, helpful for food absorption and metabolism of carbohydrates and fats, is usually ingested in a separate supplement to obtain adequate amounts. B12 is also recommended as a supplement for vegetarians and vegans, as it is hard to obtain from plant foods.

L-glutamine is commonly used as a sports supplement, as it is a major source of energy fuel for the body. It is also commonly recommended by naturopaths for intestinal conditions, as it feeds intestinal cells and helps heal the gut lining. This makes it useful for Leaky Gut Syndrome, food allergies, and immune support. Other benefits include improved brain functioning, blood sugar stabilization, regulation of muscle protein synthesis and muscle glycogen accumulation, maintenance of acid/alkaline balance in the body, and protein metabolism. L-glutamine can also be created in the body. It is converted from glutamic acid obtained from food sources. Non-meat foods with the highest content of glutamic acid are eggs, dairy proteins, wheat germ, oats and avocados. L-glutamine is widely available as a free form amino acid supplement. A powder supplement that can be dissolved in liquid and taken orally is best for intestinal healing.

<b>Nutrient</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Essential Fatty Acids	Protects the intestinal lining.	Flaxseed oil, evening primrose oil, fatty fish
L-Glutamine	Intestinal health.	Supplement recommended: 500mg twice a day on empty stomach.
Vitamin B complex	Muscle tone in intestinal tract.	5-100mg of each major B vitamin 3x a day with meals.
B12 (extra)	Energy metabolism, protein synthesis. Prevents anemia.	1,000-2,000 mcg a day, taken sublingually.

Dosages listed are for Adults. (Phyllis A. Balch, 2006)

Other nutrients that are also beneficial to digestion and intestinal health are probiotics to replenish healthy intestinal flora and fibre to cleanse the intestine. There are many varieties of probiotics on the market and choosing an effective one is crucial. A naturopath or nutritionist should be consulted to recommend a strain that can survive gastric juices and that has been quality tested. The best way to increase fibre in the diet is through foods. A combination of soluble and insoluble fibre is optimal for healthy digestion. Flaxseed is an ideal source as it consists of a combination of both soluble and insoluble fibre. Wheat bran, an insoluble fibre, can be irritating to some people and should be avoided. Fibre should be slowly added to the diet with adequate water to avoid constipation. The nutrients and supplements listed above are not a complete list of those beneficial for IBS, but they are the most commonly used ones.

Recording foods and symptoms in a daily diet journal will help identify diet triggers and food intolerances. This journal can be reviewed after 7 days for a pattern of symptoms after a particular food. The suspected food can then be eliminated and the recording continued for another 7 days to see if symptoms are alleviated. Sometimes food intolerances are not a cause, but rather an effect of IBS. Avoiding dairy products is helpful for some people to decrease mucus in the intestines, and eating smaller meals is also recommended to lessen the strain on the digestive system.

### Yoga Therapy: Ayurveda for IBS

Ayurveda is considered the sister science to Yoga, and is considered to be the oldest system of medicine in the world. In Ayurveda, diseases are understood to be caused by imbalances in one or more of the three doshas: *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. According to Ayurvedic philosophy, the doshas are dynamic forces that are combinations of the five elements in nature: air, water, earth, fire and ether. Vata consists of air and ether, Pitta consists of fire and water, while Kapha dosha consists of earth and water. The Ayurvedic diet involves eating foods according to your body type and the season. It is believed that many disorders can be healed by adjusting the diet alone, although this is not a belief that is widely shared in Western medicine yet.

Disorders and diseases of the large intestine are generally related to an imbalance of the Vata constitution. IBS has different causes in individuals, so the Ayurvedic system also considers the underlying root issues behind the condition. Ayurvedic therapy for IBS usually can involve several different approaches:

- Diet and Nutrition – To improve digestion and eliminate toxins from the body, and increase immunity.
- Herbs – To improve digestion, relieve individual symptoms, and manage stress.
- Ayurvedic massage – To improve emotional balance and also the digestive system.
- Yoga and meditation – To address underlying psychological issues and balance the nervous system, and reduce stress. These therapies will be described in the next section.

The general Ayurvedic remedies for constipation include spices such as ginger to stimulate the digestive fire, called *agni*. Natural laxatives that tone or improve the colon function, such as Triphala or Psyllium, are recommended rather than strong purgatives. Adding oily or bulk foods to the diet will ensure the stool is moving. Recommended foods include dairy, nuts, whole grains, grape and prune juice, and sesame and olive oil. Constipating foods including apple and cranberry juice should be avoided. Some lifestyle changes that may help include rising at dawn to empty the bowels, as this is considered prime Vata and colon time. Sometimes warm water or herbal tea, or eating breakfast will stimulate peristalsis, and massaging the lower abdomen can also be helpful.

In addition to the general recommendations listed above, constipation due to a Vata imbalance can be relieved by adding flaxseeds or aloe gel to the diet for bulk and lubrication. Enema therapy may be necessary in some cases.

Pitta constipation may involve a liver dysfunction, so detoxification of the liver may be necessary. Emotions involved include irritability, anger, and thirst, sweating

with body odour and burning in the rectum. Excess oils, and sweets should be avoided to reduce the load on the liver. Any therapy that involves the release of anger and emotions will be beneficial. For acute constipation bitter laxatives may be used including senna and rhubarb root. These also have the added benefit of cleansing the liver. If the condition is not acute, then bulk laxatives will be enough.

Constipation due to a Kapha imbalance is caused by excess mucus in the intestines. Physical symptoms include low energy and stool that is whitish in colour or has signs of mucus. The abdomen may also be bloated. A diet to decrease Kapha should be followed. This involves avoiding heavy and constipating food including bread, cheese and yogurt, sugar and pastries, and potatoes. As well, too much sleep may be an aggravating factor. Increasing aerobic activity is necessary. Bitter laxative herbs are suggested only for acute conditions. However, bulk laxatives and laxative oils will increase Kapha and stagnation. Enemas are helpful.

Gas and bloating are generally an indication of poor digestion and digestive fire. Recommendations include eating small and simple meals and not combining too many foods at a single meal. Spicy foods such as fennel, ginger, peppermint, bay leaves and cardamom are helpful remedies. Bloating accompanied by gas, constipation, insomnia and nervousness is commonly a Vata condition. Ginger tea is helpful as well as reducing dry foods. Bloating accompanied by heartburn and irritability is likely of Pitta origin, and can be improved by avoiding hot and oily foods and adding cooling and carminative herbs such as coriander, fennel, mint and saffron. High Kapha bloating is accompanied by excess mucus and congestion, and nausea or vomiting. Spicy herbs such as cayenne, dry ginger and cloves should be added to the diet, and late-night and overeating avoided.

Although diarrhea is mainly a Pitta condition, it can also be caused by a high Vata or Kapha condition. Generally, foods recommended include yogurt, potatoes, bananas, mint, apples, carrots, pomegranates and buttermilk. Foods to be avoided included fruit juice, prunes, apricots, peaches, pears, plums and peas. They contain

acids that may irritate the bowels. Herbal remedies that are recommended for diarrhea are garlic, ginger, papaya and basil. Garlic is particularly effective as it destroys intestinal bacterial. One effective general formula is: equal parts nutmeg, raspberry leaf, mullein leaf, and marshmallow.

Diarrhea caused by Pitta is normally yellow and foul-smelling, and may be accompanied by thirst and fever. To counter the excess Pitta, the abdomen should be kept cool and hot spices, alcohol and greasy foods should be avoided. Bitter herbs such as goldenseal and barberry and astringent herbs such as raspberry leaf are recommended. Barberry or goldenseal can be added to the general formula described above to make it more effective.

Vata diarrhea involves pain, cramping, gas and may alternate with constipation. Replacing cold and dry foods with warm soups and ensuring there are enough essential fatty acids in the diet will help reduce Vata. Carminative spices such as ginger, fennel, and cardamom are helpful. It is recommended to add fresh ginger to the general anti-diarrhea formula.

Kapha diarrhea is whitish and contains mucus. A diet to reduce Kapha should be followed by avoiding dairy, fats, breads and sweets. Hot spices to increase digestive fire are recommended including ginger, nutmeg, black pepper and cayenne. Herbs to clear mucus and stimulate digestion include calamus, bayberry, basil and sage.

Ayurvedic massage is very helpful for removing toxins and deeply relaxing the body, as well as removing negative energy from and balancing the mind. Pressure points on the body that relate to different organs, called *marmas*, are used in Ayurvedic massage therapy. These are similar to acupuncture points used in traditional Chinese medicine. There are 107 marma points on the body connected by an invisible energy network known as the *Nadis*. One of the pressure points that is helpful for IBS is called Nabhi marma, and is located at the navel. It affects the Manipura chakra and therefore the digestive system and digestive fire. Another key point located in the hollow points of the forehead temples is called Shankha marma. As it stimulates the colon it aids in

the relief of constipation, and has the added benefit of relieving tension headaches. Nabhi marma is a major Pitta point while Shankha is a Vata one. The easiest way to stimulate these marma points is by applying pressure with the thumb pad. A direct pressure can be applied, a circular clockwise one to strengthen the organ, or a circular counter-clockwise one to release stagnation.

### Yoga Therapy: Yoga for IBS

A regular Yoga practice, especially in combination with some of the diet changes recommended above, can strengthen digestion and elimination and improve many gastrointestinal disorders, including IBS. Yoga can regulate the nervous system as well as generally regulate all of the body systems. In particular, it has the ability shut down the sympathetic nervous system and stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for digestion. Subsequently, it is helpful for the individual symptoms of abdominal cramps, bloating, gas, constipation, diarrhea, and indigestion. Postures for each symptom are listed below, with the Sanskrit name in brackets.

- Abdominal Cramps. These postures massage the abdomen: Locust (Shalabhasana), Cobra (Bhujangasana), Standing Forward Fold (Uttanasana), Half Bow (Ardha Dhanurasana), Bow (Dhanurasana), Sphinx (Salamba Bhujangasana), Supine Twists (Supta Matsyendrasana, Jathara Parivartanasana etc.), Seated Twists (Marichyasana, Ardha Matsyendrasana etc.), Child (Balasana)
- Bloating: Shoulder stand, Supine Knees to Chest (Apanasana), Seated Wide Angle Bend (Upavistha Konasana)
- Constipation. The postures listed above relieve constipation as they massage the abdomen which stimulates peristalsis and massages and tones the internal organs. In addition, the following side bends will activate the Liver, Gallbladder and Stomach energy channels and move stagnant energy: Revolved Head To Knee (Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana), Extended Side Angle (Utthita Parsvakonasana), Crescent Moon (Chandrasana), Gate (Parighasana),

- Half Circle (Ardha Mandalasana). In addition, these postures are also helpful: Corpse (Svanasana), Fish (Matsyasana), Supine Knees to Chest (Apanasana), Seated Forward Bend (Paschimottanasana), Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana), Plow (Halasana)
- Diarrhea. These postures slow bowel motility and promote fluid absorption, as the abdomen is gently inverted: Dolphin (Ardha Pincha Mayurasana), Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana), Extended Dog/Puppy Pose (Utthita Svanasana), Half Shoulder Stand (Ardha Sarvangasana), Headstand Prep/Teddy Bear Stand (Ardha Sirsasana), Wide-legged Forward Bend (Prasarita Padottanasana), Plow (Halasana)
  - Flatulence/Gas: The postures listed above for abdominal cramps will also help to dispel gas.
  - Indigestion: The postures for constipation will help with indigestion.
  - General digestive strengthening. Abdominal and Hip opening postures should be practiced in addition to those above: Camel (Ustrasana), Bridge (Setu Bandhasana), Bound Angle (Baddha Konasana), Supine Pigeon (Supta Kapotanasana)

The following posture sequence for Irritable Bowel Syndrome is from "A Woman's Book of Yoga & Health" (Sparrowe, 2002).

1. Corpse (Savasana)
  - Lie on a bolster placed vertically along the spine with the head supported.
2. Reclining Bound Angle (Supta Baddha Konasana)
3. Reclining Angle (Supta Virasana)
4. Reclining Easy Seated Pose (Supta Sukhasana)
5. Inverted Staff Pose (Viparita Dandasana)
  - Sit backwards on a blanket on a chair, legs through the back of it and feet on ground touching the wall. Hold on to back chair legs and lie back with head on bolster on the floor.
  - Contraindications: Neck problems, migraine/tension headache.

6. Bound Angle Pose (Baddha Konasana)
7. Wide Angle Seated Pose (Upavistha Konasana)
8. Downward –Facing Dog Pose (Adho Mukha Savasana)
9. Headstand (Sirsasana)
  - Contraindications: High blood pressure, menstruation, migraines, neck or back problems.
10. Shoulderstand (Sarvangasana)
  - Contraindications: High blood pressure, menstruation, migraine/tension headaches, neck or shoulder problems.
11. Half-plough (Ardha Halasana)
  - Contraindications: Menstruation, neck or shoulder problems.
12. Bridge (Setu Bandha Sarvangasana)
13. Legs-Up-The-Wall (Viparita Karani)
  - Contraindication: Menstruation.

Yogic breathing practices for IBS include Dirga, Kapalabhati, Nadi Shodhana and Ujjayi. Dirga pranayama is also known as the three-part or full yogic breath, and it uses the chest, abdomen and belly for deep breathing. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system inducing calm relaxation and reducing stress and anxiety, which are common triggers for IBS. As well, Dirga pranayama massages abdominal organs, improving digestion and relieving constipation. The Kapalabhati<sup>2</sup> pranayama also tones the abdominal organs and stimulates digestion and elimination. The inhale is passive while the exhale is forced through the nostril as the abdomen is pulled back towards the spine. It is energizing and clears the mind. Nadi Shodhana, which involves alternating inhaling through one nostril and exhaling through the other, helps to balance the left and right sides of the brain and is very calming. Ujjayi pranayama is soothing and calming to the nervous system, stimulates digestion and

---

<sup>2</sup> Contraindication: High blood pressure, certain heart conditions

elimination, and builds energy in the Manipura chakra, which is the seat of digestive disturbances.

When IBS symptoms are present, pranayama breathing should be slow and relaxed. If diarrhea is present in particular, the breathing should be done gently as it is usually a Pitta condition. If there are other indications of excess Pitta, then cooling mouth breathing may be more beneficial. Shitali and Sitkari pranayama are practiced by inhaling through the mouth and exhaling through the nose. In Shitali, the tongue is curled like a straw on the inhale. In Sitkari, the teeth are closed but the lips are open with the tongue flat during the inhale.

In general, any deep breathing practiced in a slow and peaceful manner will benefit IBS sufferers.

### Yoga Therapy: Emotional Healing

No therapy protocol is complete without a prescription for dealing with the emotions, thought patterns and experiences that originally led to the present condition. There are many methods for emotional healing. Meditation can be very helpful for easing stress and anxiety, as well as writing and art for expressing and releasing emotions in healthy and creative ways.

Many people find it hard to express their emotions through words. Releasing negative thoughts by writing or journaling on paper or in an on-line blog and even by writing poems is a common therapy practice. Creating art such as painting and drawing is also recommended for some individuals to convey their feelings. Writing music or playing an instrument is also effective for dealing with emotions and healing hurt feelings.

There are many forms of meditation, but they can be classified generally into two categories: directed and non-directed. During directed meditation, one focuses the mind on an image or experience. In non-directed meditation, one attempts to transcend thoughts and elevate the mind to a higher consciousness. One form of non-directed is mindfulness meditation, where one focuses on breathing and observes and releases thoughts as they arise. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to be very

beneficial towards easing stress and anxiety. A directed meditation such as a guided meditation narrated by a meditation teacher or on audio media is usually the most beneficial and effective form for beginners. There are many audio and written resources available on guided meditations. One example is to visualize that you are in what you consider to be a safe place, for example in a secret garden. After breathing and relaxing you invite your higher self to join you and together your journey to magical places, while releasing your worries and feeling loved. Another meditation that is particularly useful for balancing emotions is to imagine you are riding waves on the water. In this meditation, you visualize the ocean with all of your senses and then imagine you are floating, either directly on the water, in a boat or on a surfboard. The water symbolizes your emotions and the waves are the experiences that affect them. As you float you imagine you are riding life's ups and downs smoothly and relaxed.

Relaxation response meditation was proven to be effective in reducing IBS symptoms in a 2001-2002 study by researchers at the University of Albany (Keefer L). Study participants were asked to practice relaxation response meditation for 15 minutes twice a day. During the initial study, improvements in diarrhea, abdominal pain, bloating and flatulence were noted. After the one year follow-up, there were additional improvements in pain and bloating. Relaxation meditation involves relaxing various parts of the body, starting at the feet and working up towards the head, or the other way around. Focussing on deep breathing and a positive mantra at the same time further enhances the effects of the meditation.

### Conclusion

Irritable Bowel Syndrome is a functional disorder of the large intestine with varying causes in individuals. Yoga Therapy and the various healing modalities it encompasses are an effective means to manage the chronic symptoms of the disorder. Further, the root cause of IBS commonly exists on a mental-emotional level, making Yoga Therapy an effective method of treatment.

## Bibliography

- Dr. Martin Hart, S. A. (2011). *The Best Meditations on the Planet*. Beverly, MA: Fairwinds Press.
- Frawley, D. D. (2002). *Ayurvedic Healing: A Comprehensive Guide*. Twin Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.
- Gastroenterology, A. C. (2008, Oct 10). *Science Daily*. "How Effective are Probiotics in Irritable Bowel Syndrome?". Retrieved March 26, 2011, from [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com):  
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081006092656.htm>
- Geoffrey K Turnbull, M. F. (1999, May). Irritable bowel syndrome. *Can J Gastroenterol Vol 13 No 4* , pp. 297-298.
- Govinda, K. (2002). *A Handbook of Chakra Healing: Spiritual Practice for Health, Harmony and Inner Peace*. Old Saybrook, CT: Ullstein Heyne List GmbH & Co.
- Hunter, J. A. (2002). A review of the role of the gut microflora in irritable bowel syndrome and. *British Journal of Nutrition* , pp. 88, Suppl. 1, S67–S72.
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome Treatment*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2011, from The Mayo Clinic:  
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081006092656.htm>
- Kam Thye Chow, E. M. (2006). *Thai Yoga Massage For Your Body Type*. Rochester, Vermont: Healing Arts Press.
- Keefer L, B. (n.d.). *PubMed.gov U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health*. Retrieved 05 08, 2011, from NCBI National Center for Biotechnology Information:  
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12038646>
- Phyllis A. Balch, C. (2006). *Prescription for Nutritional Healing: Fourth Edition*. New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc.
- Ruigomez A, G. R. (2007, Apr). Risk of irritable bowel syndrome after an episode of bacterial gastroenteritis in general practice: influence of comorbidities. *Clin Gastroenterol Hepatol*. 2007 Apr;5(4):465-9. , pp. 5(4)465-9.
- Sparrowe, L. (2002). *A Woman's Book of Yoga & Health*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.