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## Hypnosis may offer benefits for IBS

### Treatment improves symptoms of disorder, study finds



Updated: 5:50 p.m. ET Oct. 31, 2003

LONDON - Hypnotherapy can offer long-term benefits for patients suffering from irritable bowel syndrome, researchers said on Wednesday. In a study of more than 200 patients with the disorder, hypnotherapy helped to relieve the cramping, bloating and diarrhea or constipation caused by the syndrome for five years or more.

"This is the first long-term study of this nature," Dr. Wendy Gonsalkorale, of the Withington Hospital in Manchester, England, told Reuters.

Patients who had undergone hypnosis reported an improvement in symptoms, a decrease in anxiety and depression, a better quality of life and said they took fewer drugs and saw their doctor less frequently after the treatment.

"It is a viable therapeutic option for the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome," she said in a report in the journal Gut.

IBS is not a disease but a functional disorder in which the nerves and the muscles of the bowel are extra sensitive. It affects an estimated 10-20 percent of the population. Symptoms range from very mild to severe.

Gonsalkorale and her team questioned the patients about their symptoms and quality of life before and immediately after the 12 one-hour hypnotherapy sessions and for up to six years afterwards.

They found that 71 percent of patients responded well to the treatment and for most IBS sufferers the positive effects did not diminish after time.

The precise causes of IBS are not known but doctors believe a variety of things including food, exercise, hormones and stress may trigger the symptoms.

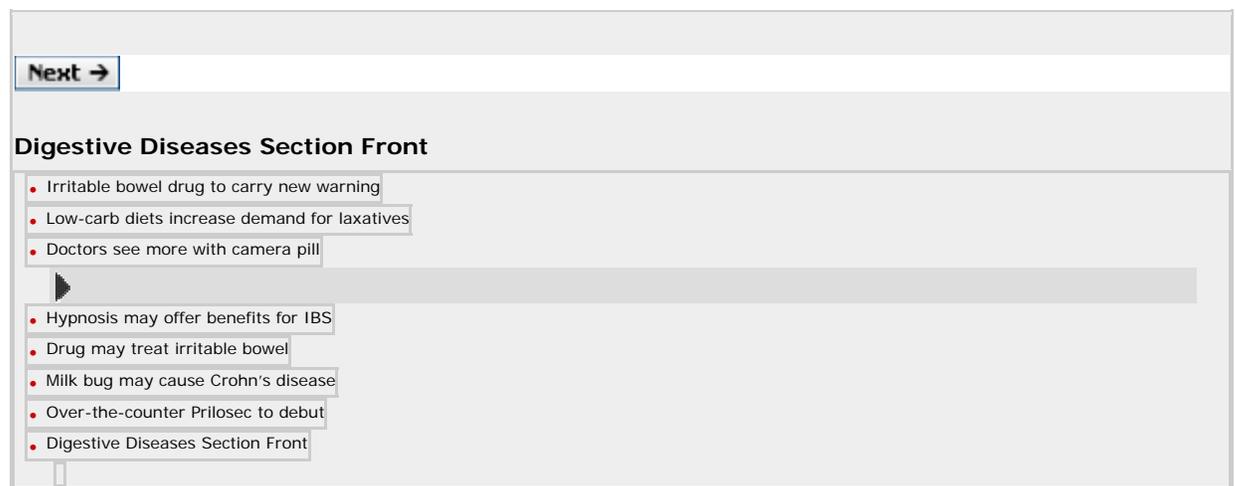
"There seem to be alterations in the muscle activity of the gut and its sensitivity," said Gonsalkorale.

She said hypnotherapy affects how the brain talks to the body through impulses in the nerves, hormones and chemicals called neuropeptides.

"Using hypnosis you can very specifically influence physiological mechanisms in the body. It can be very specific and targeted," Gonsalkorale added.

Hypnosis is probably best known for helping people to stop smoking or to recall unpleasant or traumatic events during psychotherapy. Gonsalkorale said it is also used to relieve pain during childbirth, for migraines and to treat skin conditions and asthma.

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