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## Well

Tara Parker-Pope on Health

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### Herbs, Hypnosis May Ease Common Bowel Pain

By [TARA PARKER-POPE](#)

An estimated one in five Americans suffers from irritable bowel syndrome, a disorder that can cause disabling cramping, constipation and diarrhea. But even though I.B.S., as it's often called, is incredibly common, sufferers often are frustrated by the lack of good treatment options.

Last month, The Journal of Family Practice offered a review of the most effective nondrug options for I.B.S. The [information](#) is important because I.B.S. drug treatments often don't work for many patients or pose serious health risks. The drug Zelnorm was withdrawn after links to heart problems, and the drug Lotronex has been subjected to severe marketing restrictions because of concerns about side effects.

Now doctors say there is some evidence to support nondrug treatments for I.B.S. Herbal formulations, certain probiotics, special diets, therapy, hypnosis and even journal writing may offer some relief to patients.

The review notes that more study of herbal products to treat I.B.S. is needed. However, it highlights two formulations that have shown benefit in studies. One herbal compound contained extracts of bitter candy tuft, chamomile, peppermint, caraway and licorice. Another commercial preparation called Iberogast contained all those ingredients plus lemon balm, celandine, angelica and milk thistle. Both treatments worked better than placebo at relieving I.B.S. symptoms.

Products with a probiotic called Bifidobacterium also appear to help. Soluble fiber, the kind found in fruits, oats, barley, psyllium and some beans, appears to help. Insoluble fiber, on the other hand, like that found in cereals and wheat brans, showed no benefit.

Several studies have evaluated hypnosis for patients with irritable bowel syndrome. In studies involving a total of 644 patients, about 80 percent reported relief of symptoms after hypnosis. Hypnosis was less likely to work in men whose predominant I.B.S. symptom was diarrhea.

A Web site called [IBShypnosis.com](#) includes details on studies using hypnosis to treat I.B.S. as well as experts who offer the treatment. The Mayo Clinic [Web site](#) also offers more information about I.B.S. and alternative treatment options.