

Motility disorders involving the small intestine and large bowel associated with variable degrees of abdominal pain, constipation or diarrhea, largely as are action to stress in a susceptible individual.

There are a whole panoply of symptoms that can occur in this condition. They include abdominal distress, erratic frequency of bowel movements and variability in stool consistency. Often unpleasant abdominal sensations associated with a whole range of generalized symptoms are present, and these vary from bloating and flatulence to headaches and anxiety.

This condition has very a diverse and sometimes obscure causation, leading some allopaths to put it down to purely psychological causes. Whilst stress, anxiety and psychology are often pivotal, they are but components in a multifactorial matrix. Other factors for the diagnostician to consider include food intolerance to such common things as wheat, corn, dairy products coffee, tea and citrus fruit. Similarly an intolerance to the sugar lactose has been found quite commonly. Excessive bran consumption may be involved due to overeating of 'healthy fibre'! Occasionally infectious or parasitic organisms are involved, whether *Giardia*, threadworm, *Candida* or many others, but differential diagnosis is problematic. Drugs, especially antibiotics, are a major cause.

Two extreme varieties are seen with a whole spectrum of shades in between. The **spastic colon** type is characterized by an alternation between constipation and diarrhea associated with and often triggered by eating. The other extreme is a painless but 'precipitous' diarrhea. **Mucous colitis** describes a functional disturbance in which the colon secretes abnormally large amounts of mucus which appears in the stools. From what has already been said about actions, the therapeutic possibilities of herbs in this condition are obvious and often has more to offer than other therapeutic modes.

Actions indicated for the processes behind this disease: **Astringents** will reverse the diarrhea and reduce any pathological mucous production **Bitters** will promote appropriate digestive secretions, and often will normalize bowel function by themselves. Remember the hepatic activity of bitters. **Anti-inflammatories** will reduce localized mucosal reaction. **Carminatives** will help with any flatulence or colic. **Anti-spasmodics** other than carminative may be indicated if the cramping is severe. **Vulneraries** if there is any hint damage to the lining of the colon. **Nervines** will help ease background stress involvement. **Aperients** may be indicated temporarily, but not strong as the swing back to diarrhea may be quick.

System Support Digestion and subsequent elimination are pivotal as is the nervous system. Any part of the body that is a focus for energy usage may be strengthened by using system tonics, and thus may possibly enable the body to integrate the various aspects of digestive functioning more effectively.

Specific Remedies As with indigestion, this functional problem has many remedies that can help, but none that are true specifics. Chamomile and Peppermint is an example of a

vast range of plants that have a direct impact on irritable bowel. With astringents such as Bayberry, wound healing remedies like Comfrey root or Plantain and the colic relieving properties of the anti-spasmodic Wild Yam much can be done to facilitate the healing of these distressing problems. Garlic can be most valuable. Whether this is because of an anti-microbial effect some broader impact of the garlic is difficult to say.

One possible prescription

Bayberry - 2 parts

Mugwort - 1 part

Chamomile - 1 part

Peppermint - 1 part

Wild Yam - 1 part

Valerian - 1 part **tincture to 5 ml 3 times a day.**

An infusion of an appropriate carminative nervine should be drunk warm often. This supplies the following:

- **Astringents** (Bayberry)
- **Bitters** (Mugwort, Chamomile)
- **Anti-inflammatories** (Wild Yam, Chamomile)
- **Carminatives** (Chamomile, Peppermint)
- **Anti-spasmodics** (Wild Yam, Chamomile, Peppermint)
- **Vulneraries** (Chamomile)
- **Nervines** (Chamomile, Valerian)

Broader Context of Treatment

As with indigestion, the functional nature of this problem means that just about anything that helps the person to be at ease with themselves or help physiological activity will be indicated. Diet is fundamental, but finding the key foods can be a real challenge. Structural considerations should be taken into account, as must stress and psychological issues.