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Natural nutrients that have been shown to work synergistically to reduce the symptoms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease.

In this report I want to look at four natural ingredients that, individually, have been shown to have a positive influence on Inflammatory Bowel Disease.

I estimate that around 50% of people who call our office have questions concerning Inflammatory Bowel Disease. Under this heading you can include Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Ulcerative Colitis and Crohns. Of these, sensitive Irritable Bowel Disease appears to be most common although I have noticed that calls about Ulcerative Colitis appear to be increasing. Just a small percentage of calls relate to Crohns.

Sensitive Irritable Bowel Syndrome and Ulcerative Colitis are now common in the UK with over 20% of the population suffering to varying degrees. Approximately 65% are women and 35% men.

Ulcerative colitis is one of the UK's most common forms of inflammatory bowel disease and affects an estimated 50,000 people in the UK, with a particularly high incidence in north-east Scotland. The acute and chronic disease causes inflammation and sores, called ulcers, in the lining of the large bowel.

It is my experience that if you take a multi-faceted approach to this condition you have far more chance of achieving a reduction in symptoms than if you just try one or two products in isolation.

It is for this reason that I have decided to put together this report on individual, natural ingredients that have been shown, through medical research, to have benefit to bowel health and specifically to Inflammatory Bowel Disease.

It is important to mention that my own personal experience has shown me how combining certain ingredients can have a greater effect than when these ingredients are taken on their own.

This is supported by a recent study carried out in Japan that has shown how when probiotics are taken by sufferers of Ulcerative colitis, very few benefits are shown.

However, when probiotics are taken together with psyllium husks, the quality of life of IBD sufferers was markedly improved. In other words, taking probiotics and psyllium together yielded good improvements but taking these two ingredients on their own, did not.

Details of the Japanese study

("A randomized controlled trial on the efficacy of synbiotic versus probiotic or prebiotic treatment to improve the quality of life in patients with ulcerative colitis")

Authors: S. Fujimori, K. Gudis, K. Mitsui, T. Seo, M. Yonezawa, S. Tanaka, A. Tatsuguchi, C. Sakamoto)

Consumption of both the probiotic Bifidobacterium longum and the soluble fibre, psyllium, for four weeks led to improvements in the 'quality of life' of 120 people suffering from ulcerative colitis (UC).

Researchers from the Nippon Medical School in Tokyo reported that when the people supplemented with the probiotic or psyllium husk on their own, there was no statistically significant improvements in the quality of life. It was only when psyllium fibre was taken with probiotics were benefits shown.

I have discussed this issue more in the chapter on psyllium husks.

Be patient.

However, no matter what combination of natural ingredients you use, you must take a long term view of things. Natural products rarely work overnight, but if used correctly with the right and sensible adjustments in diet, then real improvements in symptoms can be made.

Many people who contact me who are used to being prescribed drugs for different ailments are looking for quick results with the minimum amount of fuss and inconvenience (aren't we all). The reality is that with

Contents

Probiotic cultures (friendly bacteria)	2
Inulin	2
Psyllium Husks	3
Purified Omega 3 fatty acids	3
Summary	4

natural products, things don't always work immediately and therefore some patience may be required. However, all of the following four ingredients I mention in this report do have good research to support their efficacy in helping IBD – particularly if taken together. The great thing about all these ingredients is that they are all from natural food or plant sources and have no recorded side effects, so they are totally safe. This means they can be taken alongside any prescription medicine you may be taking from your doctor.

The first of the four products I want to talk about are the probiotic friendly bacteria.

1. Probiotic cultures (friendly bacteria)

You would have to live on another planet if you haven't heard about the benefits that probiotic cultures have not only for your bowels but also for your overall health. In fact there has been more than 10,000 studies to support this. There are many different 'species' of good bacteria and it is now generally accepted that to be healthy, your colon needs lots of them. As in all aspects of life, there is always a balance to be had, and your colon is no different. In it there are many forms of bad bacteria but these will do you no harm provided the good guys outnumber the bad guys. Estimates suggest that a healthy gut will be comprised of around 85% of good bacteria and just 15% bad.

It has been shown that sufferers of IBD have lower levels of the beneficial bacteria than non-sufferers. Whether this is the cause of the inflammatory condition or as a result is not always clear.

There are a number of common things that can adversely affect the levels of friendly bacteria in your colon. Anti-biotics is perhaps the most common one. This is because they kill good bacteria as well as bad, leaving your colon depleted. However, there are many other things as well. Long term use of pain killers, excessive alcohol, food intolerances, yeast overgrowth are four more. So, there are many ways in which your bacteria can come under attack. Stress is another problem. In my experience stress on its own is not sufficient to bring on severe IBD, but it might be a catalyst to an already weakened digestive system.

However, the good news is that if you can find a way to redress the balance, then symptoms can improve quite dramatically.

The stumbling block is that it is not as simple as loading in lots of good bacteria in the form of bio yoghurts and probiotic supplements.

The reason for this is the way in which the friendly bacteria performs in the Colon.

To begin with in order to survive and thrive, the friendly bacteria must have a stable environment. This means well formed, moist stools. This in turn enables healthy bacteria to populate the colon wall and to crowd out any pathogenic invaders. They attach themselves to the colon wall a little like limpets populating a rock on a beach. If things start to get destabilised, for whatever reason and waste matter rushes through in the form of frequent loose motions or diarrhoea then these conditions are not good for healthy bacteria. Their foothold on the colon wall can weaken and they can get washed away leaving gaps for the bad bacterial to fill.

Therefore the first step for any programme for IBD is to find ways of protecting the healthy bacteria and then slowing down the transit speed of waste matter in a natural way.

The first step therefore is to combine probiotic cultures with a fibre known as inulin which help to protect and feed healthy bacteria already in your colon. This is a vitally important nutrient for any bowel health programme so it's worth a closer look.

2. Inulin

This ingredient is to be found in many vegetables. The best sources are artichokes, leeks, onions, broccoli, cabbage and chicory. Inulin is vitally important to the long term health of your bowels and this is why eating lots of vegetables is so good for you. In fact our prehistoric ancestors were big-time eaters of inulin, getting most of their supplies from the root vegetable agave.

Inulin is a fibre and, once consumed, it passes through the small intestine undigested. Nothing remarkable about that as this is what most fibres do. However, once it arrives in your large bowel it starts to do something extraordinary. It starts to feed bacteria that already exists there. Studies have shown that taking just 5g of inulin can increase levels of bifidum bacteria by as much as five times! In the case of IBD situations where much of the good bacteria has been lost, inulin can be a vital piece in the jigsaw that helps to redress this balance.

Of course to get 5g of inulin daily from your vegetable intake might be difficult as you would need to eat such a high quantity. The amount of inulin in most vegetables is very small these days. However it is now sourced commercially from chicory and is available in powder form.

The great thing about inulin powder is that it is so stable. Once you consume it, you know it is going to get to the colon intact where it will do its work. You can't say the same for all the probiotics you might take in your yoghurts and capsules. Probiotics taken in this form may not always survive the acid environment of the stomach and the small intestine to get to the large bowel where they are needed.

This is why combining Inulin with your intake of Probiotics is so good. The two help each other. I have always found them to be more powerful when taken together than when taken individually. The synergy of providing probiotic friendly bacteria and inulin together is now recognised officially in scientific circles as 'Synbiotics.'

One recent study carried out at the University of Dundee found that just short term synbiotic treatment of active Ulcerative Colitis resulted in significantly higher levels of bifidum bacteria and an improvement of the full clinical appearance of chronic inflammation in patients receiving this therapy. Another major study recently concluded 'Short term synbiotic treatment of active UC resulted in improvement of the full clinical appearance of chronic inflammation in patients receiving this therapy.'

It is for this reason that in nearly every product where probiotics are used, I include Inulin.

So, extending the life of probiotic bacteria with inulin is the first piece in the jigsaw.

The second is to find a natural way of slowing transit time down so that the inulin and probiotics have a better chance of recolonising your bowel. In my experience there is only one natural ingredient that can do this and this is another type of fibre known as Psyllium Husk, a plant fibre from India.

3. Psyllium Husks

At first sight, this might seem strange. If you have diarrhoea, why on earth would you take more fibre? Clearly anything with an abrasive effect like bran fibre would be disastrous leading to a worsening of the symptoms. However, psyllium is different.

When mixed with water, psyllium husks absorb 25 times their own weight in water. The result is a soft, smooth, gooey gel which makes its way through your digestive system intact. As it arrives in the large bowel, the gel helps to 'bulk up' and bind with any waste matter and this has a soothing effect, rather than an abrasive one, and this enables things to slow down a bit. This binding effect can help to stabilise the digestive system and help stools to be formed in the large bowel. As and when this happens, any friendly bacteria that already exists, has a small window of opportunity to start establishing itself again.

Once this takes place, inflammation can be reduced and the whole environment can improve.

Certainly in my own experience, I have found that the inclusion of Psyllium Husks can be the key turning point in stabilising an otherwise 'uncontrollable' condition. It can help to create the type of environment that is conducive to the healthy growth of friendly bacteria.

Time and time again I have been contacted by people with sensitive Irritable Bowel Syndrome and UC who have been taking probiotic supplements, sometimes for many months, with no improvement in their overall condition at all. Once Psyllium husks are added to the equation, all of a sudden dramatic improvements can often be seen.

(This is why I believe that the Japanese study referred to earlier showed benefits for psyllium and probiotics together, but not for the ingredients taken individually. There have been a number of studies on psyllium husks over the last 20 years and their role in Inflammatory Bowel Disease. Please ask for our technical document for more information).

So, Psyllium husk can help slow things down and help to consolidate waste matter. For this reason it has a number of uses! For example I know of people with stoma bags who find that by adding psyllium to their diets helps consolidate waste matter that arrives in the stoma bag which makes it far easier to deal with!

I always refer to the psyllium husk as the 'rolls royce' of fibre as it is the only fibre I know that is great for diarrhoea as well as constipation. In the same way that it helps to slow things down in sensitive bowels, it actually helps a sluggish system by keeping waste matter from becoming too dry in the colon and becoming hard. Keeping waste matter moist makes it easier to pass.

4. Purified Omega 3 fatty acids

Omega 3 fatty acids have received amazing positive publicity in recent years because they are so vital for our long term health. The benefits of omega 3 are put down mainly to their anti-inflammatory qualities which have proven to benefit heart (high blood pressure) and joint health (Rheumatoid Arthritis).

These anti inflammatory qualities are now proving to be of real benefit to bowel health as well. Health professionals in the USA urge people to eat more fish to improve health. The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least twice per week.

Fish contains the essential fatty acids that our bodies need but can't produce on their own. The easiest way to get your daily intake of essential fatty acids these days is through supplement form.

The main active fatty acid ingredient is EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid).

Fish oil supplements have been studied for several years as a complementary or alternative treatment for IBD (Crohn's disease in particular). In one study 59 percent of Crohn's patients tested maintained their remission after taking fish oil supplements for one year compared to 6 percent in the placebo group. A second study showed that while taking fish oil supplements, ulcerative colitis patients were able to reduce their doses of steroid treatment.

The results of these and other studies on the anti-inflammatory effects of fish oil are promising. More research is clearly needed and is on-going. But there is consistency in the research that the use of omega 3 fish oils can reduce the requirements for steroid therapy. With fish oils, there is nothing to lose as they are totally safe to take so they have to be worth trying.

A more recent study from Japan on children with UC showed that E-EPA (a purified version of Omega 3 fish oil) was an efficient and well-tolerated treatment for ulcerative colitis in children. 1000mg of EPA was considered to be therapeutic.

As far as general bowel health goes, Omega 3 fish oil supplement are considered to be an effective way of reducing the risk of bowel cancer. In a British study, 80 percent of patients given purified fish oil capsules had a reduced risk of developing the disease.

The patients were given a highly purified form of omega 3 oil (E-EPA), which can effect changes in cells known to cause bowel cancer.

Participants had an increase risk of the cancer because they were prone to developing polyps, tiny growths of cells in the bowel that can turn cancerous. The research carried at St George's hospital in South London, showed that the consumption of the purified fish oil capsules restored cell production to normal levels.

A separate 22 year study has revealed that patients with a regular and long term intake of omega 3 fatty acids have a lower risk of developing colorectal cancer. According to researchers at Harvard and Columbian universities, of the men taking part in the 'Physicians' Health Study, those with omega 3 and fish intake experienced a cancer risk reduction in the colon and rectum. The study, a randomised trial, involved more than 21000 participants, whose intake of fish and omega 3 was assessed using food frequency questionnaires. Over the 22 years, the number of recorded diagnoses of colorectal cancer was 500.

The researchers found that the highest intake of fish was associated with a 40 percent reduction in risk of colorectal cancer while omega 3 consumption came in at 26 percent lower risk. The researcher concluded: 'Our results from this long term prospective study suggest that intake of fish and long chain fatty acids from fish may decrease the risk for colorectal cancer.'

E-EPA - a sure way to get the benefits of fish oil without any pollutants.

So, the inference is that you need to take in more fish oil to keep our bowels (and other parts of your body) healthy, but what about all the potential contaminants you hear all about?

We are all told to eat lots more oily fish but there is growing concern that the levels of mercury now found in fish could be harmful. Even some of the cheaper omega 3's are not guaranteed to be free of contaminants!! One very large pharmacy brand had to be withdrawn from the shops last year because of mercury contamination.

So, if you consume lots of oily fish, or some of the cheaper omega 3's supplements, you are faced with the difficult situation that the benefits might be outweighed by the negatives.

A good example of this anomaly is the advice given to pregnant women. On the one hand they are told to eat more oily fish because the unborn child needs lots of fatty acids for development, and then on the other hand they are advised not to eat more than two portions per week because of the danger of mercury poisoning for the unborn child.

How crazy is that?

When looking for a good source of Omega 3 for the Lepicol range, I wanted one that I would be happy for me or my family to take and I wanted one that was guaranteed to be free of impurities.

You can now get purified forms of omega 3 fish oil and these are usually denoted as E-EPA on the front of the pack. A purified oil must contain at least 60% of pure EPA.

There is now research supporting the use of fish oil supplements, combined with soluble fibre and vitamins and antioxidants as a natural but powerful combination to fight UC.

Fish oil, vitamin supplement cuts need for drugs in bowel disease

This was the heading of some new research.

Researchers at The Cleveland Clinic in the US conducted a randomized controlled, clinical trial of patients aged 18 and older with mild to moderate active ulcerative colitis. The study involved using a supplement which combined Omega 3 fish oils with soluble fibre, vitamins and antioxidants.

Patients on corticosteroid therapy who were given the oral supplement had a significant reduction in the dose of corticosteroids needed to control their condition compared to a placebo group.

Traditional treatments for the disease, including corticosteroids and mesalamine are intended to control inflammation. While corticosteroids are highly effective in the treatment of ulcerative colitis, prolonged use often leads to insomnia, mood alterations, increased appetite, hypertension, osteoporosis and other adverse effects.

These adverse effects lead to discontinuation of the therapy by many patients. However, more than 25 per cent of patients who discontinue the therapy have a relapse of symptoms. Moreover, people who took the oral supplement were less likely to start corticosteroid drug therapy, which has many long-term side effects. Previous smaller studies have shown that fish oil is effective in reducing the need for corticosteroids in ulcerative colitis patients. The current study combined fish oil with soluble fibre to diminish the inflammation associated with ulcerative colitis symptoms.

A quote from the organiser of the trials:

“The need to find new treatments that are safe, effective and inexpensive remains, and physicians should consider adding this combination of active ingredients as an adjuvant therapy for ulcerative colitis. Our study proves that an oral supplement which combines fish oil, soluble fibre, vitamins and antioxidants is safer and causes fewer side effects than many of the medications currently available to treat ulcerative colitis.”

Summary

So, in total, I have listed just four natural ingredients that have been shown individually, and in two cases together, to reduce the symptoms of Inflammatory Bowel Disease. They all work in different ways. This means that they complement each other and can be taken together. They can, of course, also be taken individually. I should add also that they are all from food and plant sources and for this reason they will not interact with any medication you may be taking from your doctor.

If you are concerned about your bowel habits/symptoms it is very important to obtain a proper diagnosis from your doctor before trying any self help.

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- Overcome even the most chronic constipation with the help of one natural mineral – magnesium.
- How I overcame Irritable Bowel Syndrome with three natural ingredients (and have been free of it ever since).
- Could Glutamine be the missing link for your bowel health? (A leaky Gut report)

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