Impacts of Gender on Irritable Bowel Syndrome

by NEWLIFEOUTLOOK TEAM

Does Irritable Bowel Syndrome Affect Each Gender Differently?

Irritable bowel syndrome, also called IBS, is a gastrointestinal disorder that affects up to 20 percent of the adult population with symptoms of abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea and constipation. IBS symptoms can significantly affect the quality of life in these patients. Although some studies indicate that IBS is more common in women, further investigation appears to indicate that it may occur more evenly in both genders. Let's take a look at gender and IBS.

Female Predominance in IBS Reporting

Some studies indicate that IBS occurs more frequently in women than in men. However, several different factors may be at play in these results. Scientists are beginning to look at which factors are indicative of gender differences in the disease and which may be attributable to more subtle influences. Irritable bowel syndrome can be caused by several different conditions, including genetics and imbalances in the bacterial flora of the digestive system. These factors can influence the onset of the disease and can occur in either gender equally.

Hormonal Factors

Because women experience dramatic hormonal changes throughout their menstrual cycles, researchers have begun to study the influence of hormones on IBS symptoms. They have learned that many women report an increase in IBS symptoms during their periods, which would indicate a significant effect on bowel condition or sensitivity, possibly from hormonal changes.

Emotional Factors

Irritable bowel syndrome is also associated with several emotional issues including depression, anxiety disorders and posttraumatic stress syndrome. Because women tend to be more open about discussing their feelings and emotional problems, they may report physical manifestations of their emotional distress. Interestingly, studies show that more women report diarrhea symptoms, whereas men are more likely to report constipation symptoms of IBS.

Physical Factors

Some data indicate that people with IBS may have dysfunction in the signals that pass from the brain to the gut. This may be due to a variety of problems, some of which may make women more susceptible to signal disruption. Food sensitivities may also play a part in the bowel’s inability to process foods. Because women may consume some foods differently during the pre-menstrual and menstrual cycles, they may be prone to greater symptoms during these times.

Social Factors

Other factors to consider when analyzing data on gender differences in irritable bowel syndrome are social. Men are less likely to visit doctors for physical problems in general. They are more likely to seek medical help only when acute symptoms are present.

Pain Thresholds

In general, women tend to have lower thresholds for pain, and this may be a factor in seeking medical help for irritable bowel syndrome symptoms. Pain tolerance can also be a feature of different ethnic or cultural groups, which can demonstrate reluctance in men to admit pain or seek medical attention for IBS.

Whether there are true gender and IBS correlations, as a medical condition, is still under scientific dispute. While some studies indicate female predominance in the condition, other studies create some doubt about the reliability of these results. The differences in the occurrence of IBS in both sexes will become apparent as this condition becomes better understood.