IBS and Embarrassment

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IBS Embarrassment

Your irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a lot of things. It is uncomfortable. It is inconvenient. It is unpredictable at times. At its worse, IBS is scary and intimidating. More than any other trait, though, your IBS is embarrassing.

Embarrassment is one of the most common feelings associated with IBS, and it is not surprising. During a difficult period with IBS, you will have to scout out the nearest bathroom wherever you go. You will have to cope with your stomach growling so loudly it interrupts your conversations. You will have to deal with the disappointment of telling your friends you cannot go out to the movies because your IBS symptoms are too bad to comfortably leave your house.

You already know the bad news. Now for the good news: embarrassment is a feeling that is completely determined by you. No one can *make* you feel embarrassed just as no one can *make* you feel angry, anxious or depressed. Those feelings come for you and your perception of the situation.

Have you ever seen someone trip and spill a plate of food at mall only to see them laugh it off? Have you ever witnessed someone make a mistake at work and have the ability to brush it off rather than become upset? These people already possess the ability that you need. They are able to laugh at themselves. They do not take themselves seriously. People that are able to do this find themselves being happier, more accepting of their situation and comfortable in numerous situations.

Embarrassment and Mood

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been around for many years and its principles are applicable to so many everyday situations, including IBS. CBT believes that thoughts, feelings and behaviors are connected through their ability to influence one another. In this case, your feeling is embarrassment. Do your thoughts and behaviors support the embarrassment or work to limit it? Thinking that your family will never accept you IBS or your friends will not want to be with you while symptoms are high increases your desire to behave in ways to conceal it. This approach limits communication, builds secrecy and increases embarrassment.

Embarrassment over a period of time without acceptance leads to shame. People feel embarrassed about something they said, did or thought. People feel ashamed of who they are. This personalization makes shame an intimidating force. Once shame takes root, it is a challenging feeling to overcome and one that will lead to depression.

To limit the impact of IBS-related embarrassment on mood, be as open as possible with the supports in your life. Gain their perspective and understanding on the situation. If other people do not accept your diagnosis, provide them with education or decide to end the relationship. At the same time, change your expectations of yourself and your IBS. If you expect to never have an audible stomach noise in public, you will be letdown and frustrated. More realistic expectations reduce disappointment and increase self-acceptance. These are sure ways to avoid

depression.

Embarrassment and Anxiety

After feeling embarrassed by your IBS multiple times, you likely begin to worry. Your worries circle about the past, present and future. You worry about how bad the last embarrassment was, how negatively people see you and how bad the next embarrassing moment will be. The more you worry, the stronger the worry grows. With intense worry, you believe there is little hope to avoid embarrassment. You begin to see your embarrassing moments as humiliating.

This worry, fear and humiliation lead to anxiety. Like depression, anxiety has a major negative impact on your thoughts and behaviors. Effectively, anxiety shrinks your comfort zone. You will find yourself denying offers to go places and do things that you enjoy while you blame your IBS. The real culprit is your anxiety.

To lessen anxiety, behaviors must come first. Your fears will always be worse than reality. Go and do an activity to show your anxiety that success during highly symptomatic periods can be had. Your friends will not shriek in terror if your stomach makes a noise. They will not be horrified if you need to race off to the bathroom. Once you develop some positive experiences, you can reduce your anxiety by pointing out how the experience did not match your anticipation. Your anticipation of the situation will always be more dramatic and negative.

IBS Humor

Doing all you can to limit your IBS symptoms makes sense. Without symptoms, there is less chance for embarrassment. For some, the symptoms are not easily managed. To decrease your embarrassment, increase your humor.

Adding humor to your life creates a changed way of thinking. The new perspective leads to the changed expectations discussed earlier. When embarrassed, you can either laugh or cry. Choose laughter every time. Here's how:

- **Add humor to your life.** Beginning the process of improving your humor can be confusing and frustrating. To improve your likelihood of success, start simple. There is no easier way to improve your sense of humor than checking out humorous material. Movies and TV shows are the obvious choices, but consider comedy albums and books as well. Experiment with different types of humor. Perhaps, some dry, English humor is a better fit than American slapstick. Reading biographies by famously funny people will illustrate how others maintain their humor through adversity. Spend a Friday night at a comedy club to expand your humor and challenge your worries.

- **Add drama to your life.** At times, people avoid any intense emotions, but this tends to be an exercise in imbalance. Adding the comedy will teach you how to laugh while adding the drama will put your situation into perspective. Watch some tear-jerking media and read some sad material to practice finding acceptance and comfort with these feelings. There is a time and place for every feeling.
- **Find funny people.** If you are surrounded by sad people, chances are good that their sadness will rub off on you. It is true that misery loves company, but miserable company will only maintain your misery. Find people that have a uniquely positive point of view. These people can be found at the comedy clubs you visit or in online communities. Study their view of the world to understand how they remain optimistic.
- **Laugh at others.** This item might be controversial, but if you cannot laugh at others, you will never be able to laugh at yourself. If you saw a passerby get pooped on by a bird or peed on by a dog, would you laugh or would you have a strong sympathetic reaction? Funny things happen to people all the time. It is your job to seek out and appreciate this humor. This does not make you mean, judgmental or cold-hearted. It only indicates your ability to see the world as a place capable of comedy.
- **Laugh at yourself.** This is the ultimate accomplishment and sign of a well-developed sense of humor. Everyone makes mistakes, and surely, you are no different. Embrace those mistakes and shortcomings through humor. A great exercise is to think about a previously embarrassing story or situation. Rather than focusing on the ways that you felt horrified or humiliated, reframe the event around humor. Practice

telling the story to people in your life. This will reduce the stigma of embarrassment you place on yourself and improve relationships you have with others. No one prefers people that take themselves too seriously.

Conclusion

IBS is not disease that anyone would choose, but if it is part of your life, quit resisting it. Avoid creating a situation with your thoughts and behaviors that breed depression and anxiety. Do not allow embarrassment to become shame and humiliation. Instead, rediscover your sense of humor. A funny joke can make the most awkward or uncomfortable situation bearable. Luckily, bathroom humor is funny to people from 3 to 93. Undoubtedly, your IBS will keep you supplied with punch lines.