



Exercise and IBS

by YVONNE BANKS

Can Exercise Benefit IBS?

Ask anyone with irritable bowel issues; would they want to take time to exercise every day? The answer is likely to be a resounding “No!” A person with irritable bowel syndrome is a frequent flyer to the porcelain throne. Many sufferers have symptoms of constipation, which makes a person feel miserable. Other IBS patients have several cramping episodes that lead to diarrhea; cramping and straining leaves them exhausted afterward. There are many who have a combination of both constipation and diarrhea. Understandably, you can see why IBS patients turn away from exercise.

Why Would Someone With IBS Want to Consider Exercise?

Interestingly enough, exercise and IBS actually work very well together, as exercise can help a patient with irritable bowel syndrome. How can physical activity possibly help anything related to the colon? Exercise offers many benefits for everyone, including those with IBS. For instance:

- **It helps to boost overall health:** Exercise promotes better health by making your body's organs work more efficiently. You can deal with daily stressors a lot better than if you are a common couch potato. Why is this important? Stress aggravates IBS symptoms. Get rid of the stress and the symptoms should abate.
- **It helps to increase colonic motility and transit time:** When a person exercises, bowels function better. The physical motion of the body keeps fecal waste from sitting around in your bowel; therefore, it can move the waste out of the body easier. When feces remain stagnate, it has a chance to become drier and harder, making it more difficult to pass.

Exercise Recommendations

There are many activities you can engage in. When you begin an exercise program, you will want to go about an exercise program slowly. It may be difficult to maintain the activity for too long if your IBS symptoms decide to flare up. However, just be sure to make the effort and stick with it daily.

Some recommended activities to start with:

- **Walking:** You may want to walk where there is a bathroom nearby. Walking around your house is a good way to get your activity in without worrying about having an accident.
- **Stationery Bike:** This activity requires you to sit while moving your legs. It may bother some people with IBS, depending whether they are experiencing a lot of discomfort with sitting too long on a bike seat.
- **Yoga:** This is a great activity to start out with; it addresses getting the exercise you need plus it offers stress relief.
- **Swimming:** If you have access to a heated pool, swimming is a good activity that would allow you to

move freely with the water acting as resistance. You may want to stay away from swimming if the water is cold since this can bring on cramping in some IBS sufferers.