



Peppermint could help ease pain in gut

I have irritable bowel syndrome. I heard peppermint might help, but it sounds like folklore to me. Is it true?

Start steeping the peppermint tea. According to recent research, peppermint really could help ease the abdominal pain associated with irritable bowel syndrome, or IBS.

According to the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders, IBS affects at least 1 in 10 people. Although they vary widely, symptoms commonly include abdominal pain and cramping, bloating, gas, diarrhea or constipation (or, surprisingly, both), and mucus in the stool. It's not a disease, but a "functional disorder," meaning the bowel simply doesn't function like it should.

IBS is a chronic condition. Some people have mild symptoms and never see a doctor about them; others experience a great deal of discomfort. Fortunately, IBS doesn't appear to damage the intestines or increase the risk of cancer or other disease.

Peppermint oil has been available in capsule and liquid form for years, and advocates of alternative medicine have sworn by its ability to relieve indigestion caused by irritable bowel syndrome. Now, scientists believe they have uncovered how it works.

The recent study, released online in April before being published in the international journal *Pain*, was conducted by researchers in Australia's University of Adelaide Nerve-Gut Research Laboratory. They found that a compound in peppermint called

icilin activates an "anti-pain" channel in the colon, soothing pain caused by inflammation that can be triggered by some foods, such as mustard or chili.

For most adults, peppermint oil appears to be safe in small doses. Heartburn has been identified as a potential side effect.

Whether or not you want to try peppermint, you should know there are other steps you can take for relief, too. The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse offers easy-to-read guidelines online at http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/ibs_ez/. Among its recommendations is to avoid foods that may trigger symptoms, which often include:

- Fatty foods, such as french fries.
- Milk products, such as cheese or ice cream.
- Chocolate.
- Alcohol.
- Caffeinated drinks, such as coffee and some soft drinks.
- Carbonated drinks, such as soda.

In addition, other foods — those high in fiber — could ease symptoms. They include fruits such as apples and peaches; vegetables such as cabbage, peas, broccoli and carrots; beans such as kidney or lima beans; and whole-grain breads and cereals. Gradually increase the amount of high-fiber foods you eat to avoid excessive gas and bloating.

Eating smaller meals also may help.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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