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Treatment Options for Patients With Irritable Bowel Syndrome & Comorbid Depression

Elizabeth Morton
University of North Dakota

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Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a functional gastrointestinal disorder (FGID) that is characterized by recurrent abdominal pain or discomfort associated with alteration in bowel habit. While the cause of IBS is multifactorial, studies have revealed that the dysregulation of the brain-gut pathways are a key disease process. External stressors or major life events may disrupt the regulation of the brain-gut axis and ultimately influence IBS onset, symptoms, and treatment response. Therefore, it is important to recognize that these are the key causal mechanisms in the development of irritable bowel syndrome (Sibelli et al., 2016).

There are several treatment options available for patients with IBS, including dietary modifications, medication, and psychological interventions. For some, decreasing the burden of symptoms from IBS may be as simple as implementing dietary modifications. Patients are usually advised to avoid foods that may provoke symptoms, such as FODMAPs (Fermentable, oligomeric, disaccharide, monosaccharide, and polyol), which are found in a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. Medications may be recommended for patients who do not respond to dietary modifications, and may include antispasmodics, antidepressants, or laxatives.

Interventional studies on IBS have been conducted in an attempt to improve the gut function in patients with diarrhea predominant irritable bowel syndrome (IBS-D). Anti-inflammatory treatments, such as probiotics and the anti-inflammatory antibiotic berberine, have been shown to be effective in reducing abdominal pain and improving quality of life (QOL) in IBS patients. The biopsychosocial model of IBS suggests that psychological factors play an important role in the development and maintenance of IBS symptoms. Therefore, it is important to consider the psychological well-being of patients with IBS when designing treatment plans.

In conclusion, IBS is a complex and multifactorial disorder that requires a comprehensive approach to management. The causation of IBS is multifactorial, and includes a combination of genetic, environmental, and psychological factors. Treatment options for IBS should be individualized and focused on improving the patient's QOL and reducing symptoms. Future research should continue to explore the underlying mechanisms of IBS and develop more effective treatments for this common and distressing condition.

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