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Health Science We

Hypnosis is twice as effective at relieving agonising symptoms of IBS than other methods, study reveals

- 'Gut-directed' therapy improved symptoms for up to 50% of people trialled
- Relaxing the brain could work better than current treatments for the stomach
- There is no cure for IBS which 10-15% of the population experience symptoms of

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By VANESSA CHALMERS HEALTH REPORTER FOR MAILONLINE

year saw relief from their agonising symptoms.

Hypnosis could be an effective way of treating irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a study has suggested. Researchers found 50 per cent of patients who received hypnotherapy after one

In comparison, just 23 per cent of volunteers who had educational lessons on how to cope with the condition reported the same benefit, according to the Dutch trial.

There is no cure for the condition, believed to strike up to 15 per cent of people, according to global estimates.

iron deficiency or vomiting in the most serious cases.

Symptoms of IBS can range from abdominal pain to erratic bowel habits and even



cent who received 'educational support' Experts say this method, of relaxing the brain to treat the gut, is proving to be successful in trials so far.

hypnotherapy, and 50 per cent for those who had group hypnotherapy, compared to 23 per

'Psychological treatment has shown a high success rate in improving IBS,' Dr Olafur Palsson of the Center for Functional GI and Motility Disorders, North Carolina, said.

'Using the brain to help the gut is a different mechanism than using medications that treat the gut directly.

'Fundamentally, if the usual medical approaches don't seem to be working well and

you have persistent symptoms, this could be a good option.' The study, led by the University Medical Center in Utrecht, enrolled 342 participants

The patients were randomly assigned into three groups for the research, published in the journal Lancet Gastroenterology and Hepatology.

Participants had the 45-minute long therapy sessions twice a week for six weeks.

The first group of 142 patients received individual hypnotherapy, while the second

This 'gut-directed' therapy was based on WHAT IS IRRITABLE treatment developed at the University

They included progressive relaxation and soothing imagery.

group of 146 volunteers did group hypnotherapy.

aged between 18 and 65 with IBS from 11 hospitals.

patients while they were given suggestions about how they could gain control over their digestive system to reduce feelings of pain and discomfort.

Positive visualisation was given to

Hospital of South Manchester in the UK in

the 1980s.

practice self-hypnosis exercises at home for 15 for 20 minutes every day. The third group, the control group, received 'educational supportive

therapy'. This consisted of six-hour long

Coping mechanisms, complaints, and the

sessions every two weeks in a group.

They were also given a CD so they could

impact on patients' social lives were discussed, and dietary information was given according to guidelines. After three months, 41 per cent of those

in the individual therapy reported an

equate relief of symptoms, 33 per cent in the group hypnotherapy, compared to 17 per cent in the control group. These benefits appeared to last for

another nine months for those receiving hypnotherapy.

'Group therapy could allow many more patients to be treated for the same cost', the authors wrote in the medical journal.

Dr Carla Flik, who led the study, said: 'We do not know exactly how gut-directed hypnotherapy works.

## syndrome (IBS) vary between different people. Most sufferers complain of:

The symptoms of irritable bowel

SYMPTOMS

**BOWEL SYNDROME?** 

 abdominal discomfort, or pain, which often comes in spasms

erratic bowel movements

CAUSES

feeling bloated

There is no known cause for IBS. Many people with IBS find that their

bouts of diarrhea and constipation

diet, and their emotions, especially stress. Studies suggest it could be caused by

symptoms can be affected by their

## spasms in the colon.

WHO IS AFFECTED? IBS can affect people of any age.

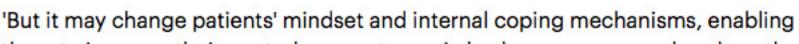
But it seems to be more common in young people.

Women are most commonly affected,

female, compared to 40 percent male.

with 60 percent of IBS sufferers

There is no cure for the condition, believed to strike up to 15 per cent of people, according to global estimates.



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them to increase their control over autonomic body processes, such as how they process pain and modulate gut activity.' People with more severe symptoms of IBS respond to this form of treatment, the

authors said, as their condition is more complex with psychological causes. Their own study did not demonstrate this, however. They said: 'These patients are

more likely to fully engage in this time consuming form of treatment, which is often perceived as the last chance for improvement of the disease.'

Nothing has been definitively explained as the cause of IBS. It has largely been seen as psychosomatic - symptoms can be triggered by a stressful event or anxiety.