

## **Hawkes Bay Today Vital Signs Column, March 2012.**

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is sadly more common than ever. Symptoms range from pain in the gut, bloating, constipation and/or diarrhoea. This may be related to food, gut function and movement, and psychological factors, such as stress and depression.

These are also symptoms of other, more serious bowel conditions. If you have been experiencing them for some time, speak to your Doctor to rule out other conditions such as Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis. It is also important that you see your Doctor if you have noticed weight loss, anaemia or bleeding.

### **Management of IBS**

While there is no cure for IBS, symptoms can be managed with dietary changes, medication and reduction of stress. It is a good idea to review your diet and eating habits. Try chewing your food for longer and eat small amounts often. Separate fruits from other foods by one hour. Drink small amounts of water often, but avoid drinking during a meal.

The bacteria in the gut are responsible for fermenting our food to break it down. Many symptoms of IBS are caused when too many harmful bacteria inhabit the digestive tract. Taking a probiotic or prebiotic may help to re-populate the gut after antibiotics, infections or in IBS. There are specific strains of healthy bacteria that can help IBS, so look for targeted products such as Ethical Nutrients IBS support.

Increasing your soluble fibre (like Psyllium) intake may help with diarrhoea or constipation and stool consistency. Antispasmodics can help reduce cramping by relaxing the muscles in the gut. Gastrosoothe is available from the pharmacy and Colofac on prescription. Peppermint oil can also be soothing on the gut and can be found in capsules or teas. Imodium can be used to control diarrhoea. Antidepressants and talking treatments have also showed some benefit.

Food intolerances can play a role in IBS and discovery and treatment of intolerance(s) may improve symptoms. 15% of the general population are said to have food intolerance. Food components to which people are often intolerant include lactose, wheat products, monosaccharides (sorbitol, fructose, xylitol), and caffeine (in coffee, chocolate, cocoa, tea, cola, sodas). Gluten, dairy, egg, yeast, tomatoes and soy may also be responsible. To identify if you have a food intolerance keep a food diary, take one food out of your diet for a time and then re-introduce it if there is no improvement. Then move onto the next food. It is important to still maintain a balanced diet and consider a low intake of "problem" foods, rather than total exclusion.

Nutritionist, Alison Cowell will be available at Ahuriri Pharmacy on Wednesday April 4 to test for food intolerances. Book your personal appointment by phoning 06 835 7948.

Anti-inflammatories such as omega-3 and turmeric may be helpful to reduce inflammation in IBS.

Finally, altering your lifestyle to include leisurely walks, yoga or other relaxation techniques may be of benefit. If depression is a factor, this should be treated by your Doctor.