

LISTENING to Your GUT

Connect
with Your Body
and
Get IBS Relief

By Laura Tirello

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My Personal Statement:

IBS is a medical condition. I am focusing on the emotional impact of the disease on our lives and helping you to reduce stress. I in no way believe that you should not get medical treatment for this disease. If you are experiencing stomach pain, discomfort or any other symptom that seems like IBS, your first stop should be at a doctor's office. After being properly evaluated, diagnosed, and given a treatment option by your doctor, then it is the time to work on the emotional aspects that may be contributing to your IBS and other digestive issues.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

I have had IBS as far back as I can remember being able to think. I clearly remember having stomach aches and difficulty going to the bathroom as far back as 5 years old. By my teenage years I would wake up in the morning with a green tongue, the result of taking Pepto-Bismol in the middle of the night. One of many endless nights of not being able to sleep due to painful stomach conditions.

By the time I reached my twenties it continued to get worse. The diagnosis came at 25: IBS with constipation and the following years were marked with lots of pain. By my thirties I found myself in the operating room receiving a very uncomfortable surgical procedure caused by the daily wear and tear of IBS on my body.

Nevertheless, I continued along with my over doing and perfectionist ways. I kept moving along pushing myself to keep “doing” which unbeknownst to me actually exacerbated the severity of my IBS.

I was in a vicious cycle but kept myself so distracted that I couldn't make the connection. In my mind, I had so many other important things to focus on than my body. But as the IBS continued in my life, I knew there was something really wrong. Not just with my body (in a physical sense), but there was a real disconnect between my body and myself.

It was in my early thirties that everything came to a head. After years of unhappiness I clearly saw that I was disconnected from my life. I was totally unhappy in a secure yet, unfulfilling job, had unhealthy friendships, and lived in a location that didn't match the lifestyle I enjoyed. I began my search for the cause of it all. And most importantly a solution.

During this journey what stood out for me was that I was disconnected from my body and my emotions. I didn't know what it meant to feel. I had spent so many years stuffing down my emotions that I had no idea the myriad of effects that years of accumulated stress had on my body and my mind.

It was this moment of realization that changed my entire life.

Once I began feeling I could clearly see where my IBS stemmed from and what triggered it into action.

Before I continue I want to acknowledge the fact that yes IBS is a medical condition and not a figment of your imagination or created solely by stress. I do believe in food sensitivities, different chemical make up in our bodies, and food allergies and the effect they can have on the way our bodies function.

My objective is not to tell you the reason you have IBS; it is to educate and support you in reducing your stress levels which in my experience has lessened the frequency and severity of my symptoms. I have also worked with numerous clients who have also experienced relief and that has fueled my desire to share these tools with you.

I do not claim to be able to cure, diagnose or treat any disease you may have.

My goal is to help you uncover strategies that will help you lead a more active, healthy, and fun life despite suffering from IBS or other digestive disorders. I am going to do this by sharing with you how important our emotions are in the cycle of IBS. I have titled this e-book "Listening to Your Gut: Connect with Your Body and Get IBS Relief" because the answer to living successfully with IBS lies within. When you learn to release the pressure and suppressed emotions that are stored within your body, your body begins to feel like it has more of a flow. It is no longer blocked by a stress cycle. This does not mean you will be instantly symptom free, it means

that you will be able to give yourself mental relief. And since symptoms tend to get worse with stress, a decreased level of stress will give you more freedom.

Background Information

Before I delve into these concepts I would like to discuss the two different kinds of IBS: IBS-C and IBS-D. As I revealed earlier I suffer primarily from IBS-C, though I do occasionally have some bouts of IBS-D. The tools in this e-book are effective with both of these conditions, as well as provide mental relief for other digestive disorders like Crohn's or colitis . Though your experiences and symptoms may be different, the concept is the same: relief comes from relaxing the mind and being aware of the body. Expecting an external thing out of your own control to magically change a circumstance simply through force is a waste of energy. Focusing on your mental clarity, connecting with your body, and being aware of your emotions will allow you to handle any circumstance in a more empowered way. This will reduce your stress level and help you focus more on truly experiencing life without the fear and pain created by IBS and other digestive disorders.

Chapter 2: Understanding Your Brain and Emotions

We are all born with what is called a “Lizard Brain”. In scientific terms this is called the amygdala. It is an almond sized structure in the limbic system that controls both our fear responses (the fight or flight response) and our emotions. It functions on the unconscious level. Our body feels this unconscious response, but for the most part we are not aware of what the body is sensing. The reason we are not aware of this is because there does not have to be a physical threat for our body to respond; stressful thoughts can trigger the same reaction in a person depending on their sensitivity to the stress cycle. On a physical level, you may notice an internal jolt or have a sense that something is off. When the body responds to a stressor it also changes the functioning of the nervous system. Even the slightest threat can create a change in our body’s functioning.

To understand this we need to understand how our autonomic nervous system works. Our autonomic nervous system is part of the peripheral nervous function and is a control system that affects our heart rate, digestion, respiration rate, salivation, perspiration, urination, and sexual arousal. It performs this task involuntarily below the level of consciousness, with the exception of breathing.



As I mentioned earlier, threats can come in different forms. There is a physical threat that is fully apparent to our conscious mind and a mental threat in the form of stressful thought that is felt within the body. When the body senses a threat, in either form, it shuts down. This temporary shut down changes the functioning of the organs involved in the autonomic nervous system. For many this is completely temporary and the body goes back to normal functioning. But for people who are exposed to high levels of stress over time or are simply just very sensitive to it, this shut down begins to affect the functioning of their autonomic nervous system.

When we are exposed to stress our body is unconsciously constricting, for many this constriction takes place in the abdomen. If your body is more prone to digestive issues, the constriction may worsen your symptoms. The symptoms themselves will vary as the body is not able to digest optimally. Many people with IBS also talk about feeling anxious or having bouts of anxiety. Anxiety is a response of the fight or flight mechanism. Anxiety affects the pelvic region intensely because the vagus nerve from the amygdala runs straight down from the brain to the gut, and is the main communication conduit. So if you have IBS to start with, when you are in fight or flight your symptoms will become intensified. Our body is meant to be in rest and digest and that is how our digestion system works best. That is why using stress reduction techniques and relaxing helps the body to get back on track.

But it's hard to relax when our mind is going full speed with the number of thoughts and emotions that move through it each day.

In society at large, we are not used to feeling our emotions or our gut instincts. So when they appear we ignore or suppress them. These “unwanted” emotions get trapped in our bodies. Again, it is important to note that it does not need to be particularly stressful situations or interactions that trigger the body's flight or fight response. The stressful thought patterns and our resulting emotional suppression are also patterns formed subconsciously as a reaction to situations we are exposed to in childhood.

I have worked with many clients who were able to trace their current stress responses directly back to events or relationship patterns from their childhood. Though it may sound daunting at first, doing a little digging in your past can be incredibly freeing. It can give you the missing link between where you are stuck or suffering and where you would like to be. It can also help you recognize the emotional pain that may be imbedded in your IBS symptoms. This does not mean that your IBS is not a legitimate medical issue. You should contact a doctor if you are having any IBS symptoms and should also contact a therapist if you feel that the emotional hardship involved in having the illness is overwhelming you.

I've mentioned how emotions are connected to the responses of our autonomic nervous system, but I think it is most crucial to understand what our emotions actually are. Our culture does not provide us with many role models for understanding our emotions and to a certain degree emotions are looked at as negative. So in return we spend a lot of time avoiding them.

Emotions are a physical vibration in your body. Too often we do not feel this sensation because we are taught to avoid emotion because the act of feeling is deemed "scary" in our culture. We also avoid emotions if we have endured some kind of trauma, particularly in our childhood. As a child, emotions are a very difficult concept. When we are exposed to a trauma, whether it is big or small, children shut down in an effort not to feel. For many this pattern carries on to adulthood.

Years of accumulated stress compiled with avoided emotions have an impact on our body. We shut off feeling bad emotions and then they build up in our body and affect the body's natural harmony. Then over time it becomes a pattern of behavior that the body follows. These stuck emotions are often triggered by things in our daily environment and our mind and body slip into the fight or flight response and shut down accordingly.

When we learn to feel emotions it equals better health and wellness. We release the pressure that is built up in our bodies and this unclutters our minds. It also returns

the body back to a more relaxed state. While you may not be completely symptom free the mental affects of the IBS will lessen the more you release accumulated stress. You are breaking the cycle and creating healthy patterns that will allow your body to function more efficiently and harmoniously. The key to being successful in breaking the cycle is becoming aware of your body's responses and recognizing triggers.



Tool #1: Recognizing Your Thought Loops

Step 1: Stop

Stop yourself 3x and notice what you are thinking. Write it down. Try this for a week straight and see if a pattern emerges. Most likely you'll notice a negative thought stream that reoccurs like a loop.

Step 2: Question

Now that you recognize it, gently question it. Ask it if it is true? What basis does it have? This questioning separates you from the thought, allowing you to see two parts of yourself. The truth and what you have believed after years of social training.

Step 3: Respond

Create a response for the part of yourself that emerges with the negative emotionally charged and often worried thinking. Treat it gently and give it re-direction. Just a simple acknowledgement will often quiet a restless thought pattern.

Chapter 3: Awareness

Awareness is actually a two-part process: body and mind.

The Mind

I'm going to start with the mind since most of the people who come to work with me often complain of a restless mind. They express that they suffer from non-stop thinking, doing and a constant busyness driven by a mind that cannot shut down. For many of my clients the voice is one of hypervigilance or worry, but masks itself as the voice of control or reason. A protector of sorts.

"I am very logical" most of my clients say. Logic is not a bad thing; it's just when it goes into overdrive that it becomes a problem and acts as an obstacle to your desires. That is what makes us feel stuck. We want better health and less stress, but we spend a lot of our time operating in a mode that doesn't allow us to have those things.

Knowledge opens our minds, gives us an understanding and reveals possibility; awareness opens us up to acceptance of ourselves. Through awareness we learn to look objectively at our every thought, mood, or desire.

No more blame or shame or self-judgment.

In order to start to become aware you have to be able to recognize the voices in your head. You have to know who's talking. Martha Beck says that each of us have an essential self and a social self. Our essential self is who we are at our core. It is made up of all of our unique abilities, talents, and personal way of being . Our social self is the part of us that was molded by parents, friends, and society in general. It is the part of us who is focused on doing the right things. It's main objective is to protect us from harm by helping us conform but taken too far it can become a relentless dictator. Often referred to as the lizard brain, it rears it's ugly head and

tries it's best to protect us from doing anything that may be too risky. You may see it as the critic in that it uses criticism to stop you in your tracks.

Now can you see why your mind is moving so fast, trying to process all of these demands.

You can also see why “trying” really hard to fix things only pushes the mind into a further tailspin. I often hear my clients talk about how hard they've tried over the years to cure their IBS. Go on any forum and you'll see people discussing all the ways they've desperately tried to cure themselves of IBS. Though I believe supplements and other things can bring some relief, I think the constant focus on trying to “self-cure” or “fix “themselves creates more mental stress. It's like switching one obsession for another. They are obsessing over having the disease; it's their main mental focus and then they are obsessing over curing themselves of it. Both of these thought distractions are ways to detach themselves from their emotions. By avoiding our emotions we in turn increase our stress levels which then acts as a trigger to further irritate our IBS symptoms. It becomes an endless cycle.

It is when we take our minds off of the fact that we are somehow broken because we have IBS that we are actually able to relax. And when the mind relaxes the body follows.



Tool #2: Snap Out of It

If you find your mind focusing on the same worrisome thought or group of thoughts this is a great tool to practice.

Step 1: Guide

Use the gentle voice I discussed in Chapter 2. Find a sound or word that will get it's attention.

Step 2: Redirect the voice

Choose a phrase or word that feels comforting. At first going right to re-directing it may be difficult, you may need a physical reminder. I was given great advice from a therapist when I was in my twenties and caught in an anxious loop, she told me to wear a rubber band and snap it anytime my mind began to obsess and worry. Sounds funny, but it works.

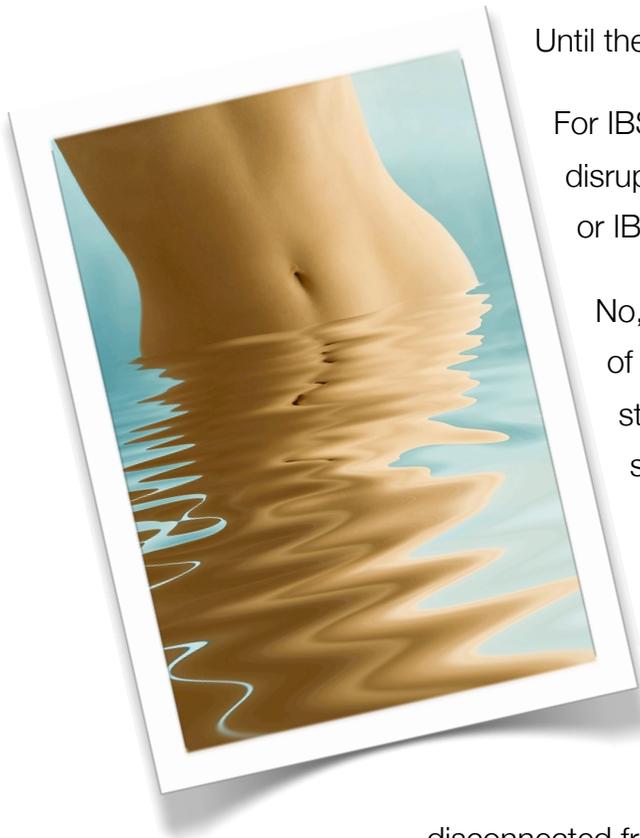
Step 3: Question

After completing steps 1 and 2, you will be able to stop your mind long enough to re-direct it by questioning the validity of what you are worrying about. Then you will be able to replace your anxious thought loop with something that your mind feels comfortable with.

The Body

Now that you understand what your mind is doing it becomes easier to identify patterns and heighten your awareness. The problem is that if you do it only in your mind you truly miss big clues about why you are responding in certain ways.

It's time to get the body involved. The body gives us cues all the time but since we're so stuck in the mind chatter, we often don't notice.



Until the symptoms are too big to ignore.

For IBS sufferers, dealing with constant stomach disruptions consume their lives. Whether you are IBS-C or IBS-D your quality of life is greatly compromised.

No, it's not all in your mind. However, not being aware of the mind chatter and your mental responses to stress do add more pressure on your body and symptoms do tend to increase.

Why?

I'll use an example from my own life. I had an overactive dictator who always told me to be perfect at everything I did from a young age. It never felt good to live that way, but since I was disconnected from my body I didn't acknowledge those feelings.

Over time my stomach began to protest it's unhappiness in a very loud voice. With every stress I put upon myself it got worse. But when I learned to become aware of the voices and the stressors (triggers) my stomach started to settle down. Had I cured myself? No. But I had started listening to my body and what it was telling me.

So how do you get started?



Tool # 3: Body Awareness Tool

Step 1: Notice stillness

Set a timer to go off at a certain time three times a day. When the timer goes off stop what you are doing and notice what the stillness feels like. Is your mind still moving, what is it saying? Write it down.

Step 2: Breathe and Feel

Take three long belly breaths, close your eyes and do a scan of your body. Do you feel any areas of tension? How does your stomach feel? Just notice what your body feels like. You are just observing and noticing; you do not have to do or fix anything. When you are finished you can write down any areas of tension you noticed in your body during this exercise. You may have also noticed new thoughts; you should record these as well.

Step 3: Let Go

You may notice throughout the day that your symptoms are better or worse with certain thoughts. When you notice that your body feels tense or more intense pain with a certain thought this is known as a trigger. As you get more comfortable with the process you'll be okay with the discomfort that arises with triggers. Letting go of that resistance is the first step in getting relief.

It's important not to judge your mind or body. A big part of being aware is just noticing without judgment. Awareness is what separates you from your mind jumble. It also helps stop you from over focusing on your IBS symptoms. This helps tremendously because what you focus on expands.

Chapter 4: Focus

Now that you have an understanding of becoming aware of your thoughts and emotional triggers you'll get a heightened sense of exactly where your focus is all day. You may notice that it alternates between anxiety or worry about daily life, relationships, and a hyper focus on your symptoms. It's hard not to focus on your symptoms if you are suffering from IBS or other digestive issues; for many it can dictate your daily schedule. Not to mention the pain and discomfort that can be a disruption to your mental focus.

If you've found yourself hyper focused on your IBS symptoms or pain, don't criticize yourself. It's completely natural. Your mind is just doing what it thinks it needs to do. Be gentle with yourself. Adding criticism to the mix will just put your mind back into a tailspin.

Instead, try to flip your focus. In other words, consciously lead your thoughts away from pain and worry. Notice when the symptoms and accompanying thoughts arise. Then step back from them mentally.

At first it may seem difficult.

I mastered this by using a technique I learned after remembering the resistance I had as a child to being around bees. Sounds strange, but read on and it will make more sense.

At first, simply flipping my focus was a difficult thing for me to do. I was constantly focusing on all the worries and anxieties that my "monkey mind" was conjuring up.



When I wasn't focusing on that I was focusing on why my stomach or other ailments I had weren't getting better.

This is how I was able to conquer my personal monkey mind:

The concept of the "Monkey Mind" comes from Buddhism. It is a way of describing our self-criticism and our mind's tendency to move from doubt to worry. In "The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying", Soygal Rinpoche compares the monkey mind to a beehive. If you can imagine your mind's chatter to be like the constant buzzing of bees around the hive, you will realize you have a choice. The bees are not going to stop, and in trying to force them to we can easily provoke them into chasing us. The choice is clear: leave them alone.

When I was little I remember quite clearly being stung by bees on several occasions. I remember standing on a rock and bees beginning to swarm my head. As children often do, I reacted. I tried swatting them away, which of course infuriated them more. I wound up running home crying with several bee stings to the head. I remember sobbing in pain for a long time afterwards.

When I look back at this I realize I desperately wanted to control the situation. My fear caused me to react frantically, which was a threat to the bees. After being stung I was devastated by the fact that they had won. Something inside of me so desperately wanted to protect myself, and I felt crippled by the defeat.

I realized as I matured into an adult that I still followed this reactive mode of self-protection. When I began doing self-work and recognized my monkey mind and the havoc it was creating in my life I went full force after it. I tried everything: suppressing it, analyzing it, and even arguing with it. But I found that these efforts only intensified its' existence. Then when I tried to flip my focus it came right back like a magnet.

For me, visual imagery always works best. It was not until I imagined those thoughts as a beehive that I started to be able to separate myself from them. As

soon as I heard the buzzing I did what I should have done as a child: I stepped back. I acknowledged them but they no longer pushed me along and I was no longer reactive to them. When you realize they will always be there and get comfortable with that, they don't dominate your life.

Tool #4: The “ I Can” Tool

Take focus away from I can't and change it to I can. When we resist something we do so because we can't allow it to be present in our lives. We feel we can't live a successful life with IBS or other digestive disorders. We feel it disrupts our careers, relationships, and our social life. We get caught up in what we can't have or do because of the disease. However, if we release the resistance we have to living with the disease, we can accomplish many things. There is a ton of scientific research confirming the power of the mind. If we begin telling ourselves through the use affirmations or mantras that we can do things, we can actually do them.

A client of mine, I'll name her Jane, was traveling internationally for her job. She found herself in Rome with a bout of IBS that left her in the bathroom for hours. She was just a few hours away from a nine-hour international flight back home to the U.S. As she sat in her hotel room she repeated, “I can do this” along with other affirmations over and over. She was able to not only get on the flight, but was able make it through the entire nine hours without incident. If getting through the fear of a nine-hour flight may seem like too much right now, it may help to know many of my clients use the same technique in their daily lives. It helps them to achieve smaller goals that they feared their body was unable to handle.

How to create a mantra:

In order for the “I Can” tool to work it's important that you create a mantra. It could be as simple as I can do this as my client Jane told herself before the flight or something more specific. An example would be: my body is calm, my mind is clear, and I feel safe enough to go to the party.

Chapter 5: Emotional Access and Release

You may have noticed in the last chapter I mentioned how mental stress can create tension in our bodies. I also talked about emotions and how we feel them in our bodies in Chapter 1.

At this point, you understand how emotions play out in the body in a physiological sense, now it's time to look at how they affect our daily lives.

Emotional Access

I often ask my clients how or what they are feeling. Initially most of them are stumped. They generally say good, happy or tired. Sometimes they say depressed. I ask them to dig a little deeper and define it as one of the following: happy, sad, anger, fear or joy. When they dig a little deeper they are often surprised at what they find.

They often feel guilt or jealousy, which are cover emotions for fear or anger. That's the funny thing about emotions; they are often layered on top of one another making them hard to distinguish. Between that and the fact we avoid them it's no wonder we are unaware of our emotions.

What I notice with most of my clients is that behind their IBS symptoms are lots of hidden emotion and self-sabotage. They are often laden with guilt over everything, even things way beyond their control. They also spend lots of time berating themselves over "imperfections" they may have. Behind this negative self-talk are emotions that have been stuffed away.



When you learn to access your emotions you begin to FEEL honestly and openly. This level of transparency with yourself is so healing to your soul that you no longer need to hide yourself behind guilt and sabotage. You simply feel what you need to feel and let it move through you.

At first this is easier said than done. It's kind of like being a baby again and learning to understand yourself in a new way.

You can ease yourself into this process by: being consistent with the daily check-ins and body awareness I spoke about in Chapters 2 and 3.

Emotional Release

Now that you recognize that you've got them: it's time to release them.

Fear, anger, and other emotions hide in your body, particularly in your stomach, as tension. As you begin to identify these emotions, notice where tension or discomfort shows up in your body. When you become aware of this you can create a way to release them. I've included an example from one of my clients to show you how it works.

Client Example

I worked with a female client who was 80 years old. Let's call her Emily. Emily had lived a full life with a husband and children. Her husband had passed away years before I started coaching her. She had different physical symptoms ranging from constipation to feet issues that her doctors could not diagnose and did not believe were harmful to her overall health, but she found them to be very troublesome.

I told her to relax and focus on her breathing. When she was ready I asked her to identify an area of tension or tightness in her body. She immediately felt something in her stomach that she described to be heavy like a weight. I asked her to imagine it loosening and getting lighter. But it felt so heavy and tight in her stomach she just

couldn't do that. I worked with her 20 minutes or so allowing her to both feel the weight and giving her suggestions on how to release it. Eventually she was able to release the tight feeling created by the weight and fell into a deep state of relaxation.



Tool #5: Loosen and Release Tool

You can try this if you are noticing tightness or cramps from your IBS. Get in a relaxed position and focus on your breathing. Go to where your body feels most tight. What color do you see in this tight place? Can you make it change colors? Can you imagine it shrinking in size or dissipating like water? Can you see it moving your body? Can you hear a sound or make a movement to facilitate its release? Do not force it; just ask your body what it wants to do. You may not get full relief the first time with this tool, like everything we learn it takes time and practice. But you may notice a subtle difference each time, so don't give up. At some point you will be able to achieve a more heightened sense of relaxation. Before trying this technique you should speak to a doctor first to make sure of a correct diagnosis and follow the protocol they advise. This tool is meant for relaxation purposes only.

Chapter 6: Adding Pleasure to Your Daily Routine

I probably should have made this the first chapter... but if you're anything like I used to be you need the facts first and fun later. That was a big part of my problem as well: I was way too serious. I was so busy doing lots of "stuff" and trying to do it perfectly that I put any kind of fun on the back burner.

When we do not allow ourselves to receive pleasure in our lives in any form it wreaks havoc on our bodies and our minds. I spent so much time being guilt ridden about enjoying life and judging every action I took that I completely forgot how to experience pleasure. When I learned to do this it opened up my spirit, which in turn opened up the doors to healing the stress in my body.

Being open to abundance in our lives does great things for both our mind and body. It allows us not to just live our lives but experience our lives. We can experience it anyway we choose using our power of perception. So instead of using our senses just to smell, taste, feel, etc. we can use them to heighten our experience.

Here are some ways you can actually use your senses to increase mental and physical well-being:

- ✓ Use specially scented soaps, like Jasmine, that invoke a positive feeling
- ✓ Surround yourself with music at certain points of the day.
- ✓ Give yourself the pleasure of wearing clothes and colors that invoke a sense of freedom and unique style to them
- ✓ Walking and listening to the quiet noises of nature
Using your creativity in any form that feels good to you

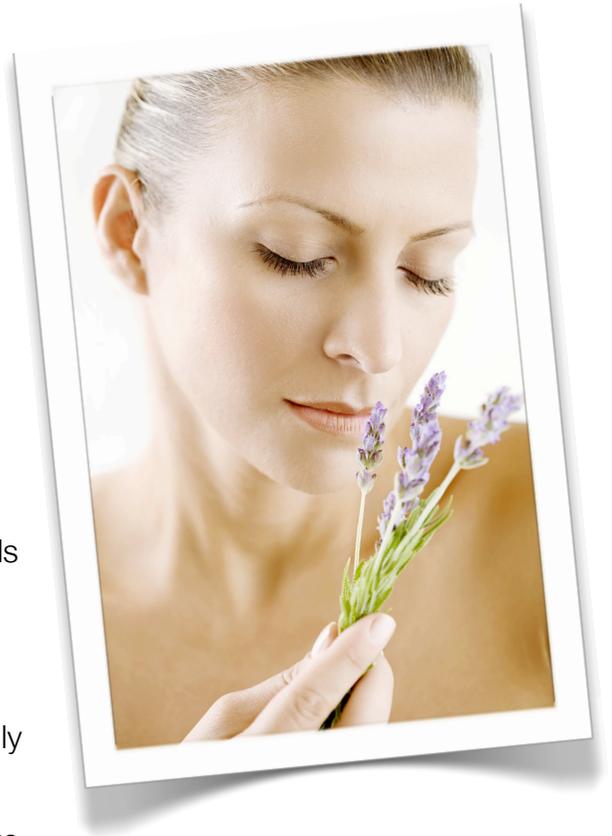
I added the word pleasure to this chapter about daily routines because following a daily routine is where most people experience difficulty. It often feels like the obligations and shoulds in our life stand in the way of developing a healthy daily routine. But that doesn't have to be the case. If you add some pleasure, and a variety of different mind body tools you're on your way to creating a recipe you won't be able to resist doing because it feels so good.

Think about what would heighten your senses and make you feel more alive. Add it to your daily routine. Why? We talked about focus in the previous chapter. When you open your senses to receive pleasure your focus is taken away from the discomfort and pain of IBS. This is essentially flipping your focus. And the more you do that the more you feel good as a whole. Will it erase all symptoms? No, but it will allow you to decrease your stress which will help your body's reaction.

Here are some simple ways to incorporate awareness of your mind, body, and senses in your daily routine. They are part of my daily routine and based on the tools I have discussed in previous chapters:

Mind: Notice a particular nagging thought. Write in my journal and allow myself to express my feelings in their entirety. No rules!

Body: Breathing exercises. On some days they are as short as a moment of quiet breathing. On other days it is breathing with a focus on a mantra about my body that feels good.



Stretching and physical exercise are things I use to release stored tension in my body.

Senses: I incorporate many of the activities I mentioned in the ways to use your senses paragraph in this chapter. One day it may be a hot bath; another day it may be using a specially scented soap like Jasmine that evokes a certain positive emotion or evokes a pleasant memory. I include long walks in nature with my dog almost everyday.

I make these exercises a non-negotiable part of my day. I set aside time to focus on my mind and body even if I only have 5 minutes that day to dedicate to the work. My suggestion is to do the exercises for 15 to 45 minutes per day. Try not to exceed 45 minutes a day of self-work. You can over focus on self-work and then it becomes a distraction from being aware of the present.

Chapter 7: Wrap Up

The best way to wrap up this e-book is to tell you it's up to you to do it your way. I've suggested different tools and techniques but it's up to you to decide how to implement them in your life. The most important thing I've learned in my personal journey is that there are no rules. And though it is important to make stress reduction a part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth, you have to add in a way that does not feel restricting or confining. If it feels freeing, you'll want to do it.

There are some times when you need quick solutions for everyday situations. So I've included a few more tools that you can carry in your pocket and use when needed anytime and anywhere. These tools are meant to decrease the stress and anxiety that many IBS sufferers feel when they believe an episode may begin.

Quick Solution Tool #1: Fight or Flight Release Tool

As I mentioned earlier in this book when our minds begin to create worry, our bodies feel the worry and see this as a threat. Then our bodies start to tense up. This built up muscle tension can have a negative effect on our digestive system.

If you are at a restaurant or at work and are worried about your IBS symptoms and are feeling stressed that they will make an appearance, this is a simple tool that will take your mind off of worst case scenario thinking.

Find a quiet place like a conference room or the bathroom.

Count the number of breath cycles (a cycle being one inhale and exhale) you take during the span of one minute. Don't try to change the breath – just notice it.

Breathe into your low belly (without pushing or forcing – just intend your breath to go into your low belly) three times. While you are breathing, hold one palm out, face

up, in front of you. As you inhale, raise your arm, palm up, as if it were a lever that allows air to fill your lungs. At the top of the inhalation, flip the hand over and slowly push the arm down, as if this lever is now allowing air to leave your lungs. Do this with each breath cycle, and count the number of cycles for one minute. Allow the arm movement to smoothly slow your breath for you without any effort whatsoever.

As you do this notice if your tongue is resting at the roof of your mouth. Allow it to relax and float in your mouth.

When the minute is over slowly open your eyes and become aware of how your body feels. You can continue the exercise if needed. I also find it helpful to create a mantra or phrase that helps my mind stay in the relaxed state I have created.

This activity will relax you and enable you to face the worry that your mind is creating in a more healthy way. It will allow you to talk to the fear, which will reduce the anxiety you are feeling and calm your body. In my personal life and in the experiences of my clients this tool has calmed the body down enough so the worst case scenario did not occur.

Quick Solution Tool #2:

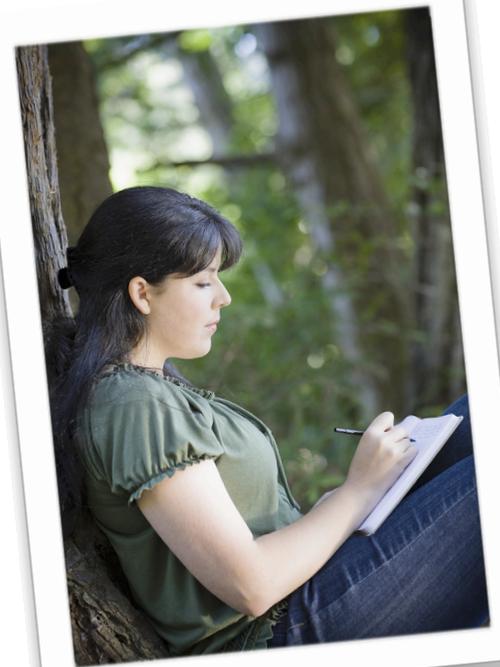
If you find yourself on vacation and are hiding out in your room because of IBS or other digestive symptoms, this tool will help get your mind off the symptoms and perceived disaster and back to a better focus.

As I mentioned earlier the more we focus on something the more our mind goes into a tailspin and our bodies' respond by tensing up. Though IBS and other digestive disorders are not in our head, there could be things we are holding onto emotionally, which may be creating tension in our system unconsciously. Even the worry over how long an episode can last can cause tension. Then of course we spend time berating ourselves for not finding the right way to fix our problems. All of this combined lends itself to emotional suppression.

Release Journaling Tool

For this tool you can allow yourself to release anger or other negative emotions by writing out your frustrations in a journal. Let it all out. Though at first you may be writing about the frustration of being stuck in your hotel room during a perfectly lovely vacation, you will notice that other emotions begin pouring out. Let it just come out without censoring yourself. Some of it may even seem down right silly, but let it all emerge. When you have nothing left to write simply ask yourself what the message you are receiving is. What is anger telling you? What do you need? What can you change in your thinking to allow this anger the space to move?

As you answer these questions you are accessing your inner voice. This is the voice that relaxes us and gives us clues about what we need to do to emotionally to heal ourselves. Again let your mind go into the writing. After this kind of emotional cleansing we often feel relaxed and more open. We also have successfully diverted our negative mind cycle that feels so uncomfortable in our bodies. Resolving the mind chatter can help your feel better and be more active. For my client Jane that I mentioned in Chapter 4 it allowed her the strength to board an international flight and fly successfully without issues. Personally, journaling allows me to resolve the emotions I am holding in my stomach. After I journal my body often feels lighter and I feel relaxed and can approach situations much differently than before I began writing that day.



Conclusion

If you have just been diagnosed with IBS it can feel that you have been sentenced to a life of pain and unpleasant trips to the bathroom. It's okay to feel angry and frustrated. In fact it's important to allow any emotions that surface. The less pressure you place upon yourself the more your body will relax. And even though this may not remove your pain completely, it will allow you to live a better quality of life. In time, this focus on what you enjoy in life will allow you to free yourself from the burden of IBS.

I too was a skeptic before I began this work. But time and time again I have seen how it has had a positive impact in my life and the lives of my clients. My suggestion to you is to give it a try for a few weeks using the tools consistently. I would love to hear how it works for you. You can contact me at Laura@ibslifestyle.com

I am available for private and group coaching if you would like some support in using these tools and a variety of others I use with my clients. You can find out more information about working with me at www.ibslifestyle.com



Laura Tirello is a Wellness Coach who educates and supports people who suffer from IBS and other digestive disorders by providing them with stress reduction techniques and coping strategies to help them enhance their quality of life.

As an IBS sufferer for most of her life, she understands the emotional and physical impact that IBS presents in daily life. She enjoys helping people discover their own path to pain relief and create more freedom in their lives. Learn more about Laura on her website: www.ibslifestyle.com