

Managing IBS: The Personal Growth Approach

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The chances are that if you don't have IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) yourself then you know someone who does: even if they're not aware of it or wouldn't call their symptoms by that name. It's a condition of our time. Indeed it's a comparatively new diagnosis. When I had a variety of tummy upsets as a child, I doubt IBS was an option available to my GP. In hindsight, reflecting on how my stomach aches of the time were probably situation and stress dependent (like not wanting to do sports because of a bullying PE teacher) I wonder if they too, today, might be labelled IBS?

Despite the lack of clear agreement on what causes IBS, there is a generally accepted and close link between IBS symptoms (of which there are many: include whichever ones you're bothered by!) and stress. The correlation between anxiety and IBS is high . . . and this is probably a vicious circle: the chicken and egg question. Which comes first the anxiety or the IBS?

So we need to break the cycle! If we could understand what makes us anxious and find ways of being less worried, not only would we feel calmer and happier, but IBS symptoms would, almost certainly, diminish. This has certainly been my experience over many years suffering from IBS.

In my case (we're all different but others may resonate with this) I put it down to having become, during my early years, a scaredy cat. I put no blame on anybody for that (my parents did their best to bring me up according to the norms and best-practice of the day), but the result was a young man who wouldn't say boo to a goose. Thinking back, I probably had my first bad bout of IBS as an undergraduate when I moved out of halls of residence and had to fend for myself for the first time. Anxiety is an understatement!



Since then, through singing (folks clubs, for example) amateur dramatics and public speaking in work situations I've gradually been finding my voice, learning to express myself and be myself. But still the scaredy cat is there, not far beneath the surface in some situations. With conscious effort to face and work through my fears and suppressed childhood emotions, gradually the number of scenarios where I feel at peace is growing. Slowly, but surely, the anxious little boy is growing up.

For look at the cat: are they ever scared? I don't think so! The presence

of a cat, behaving naturally, is a good role model in our personal growth journey: finding our inner power, being so at one with each and every moment that we can pounce or play as appropriate.

I've found that managing my IBS is about becoming aware of my anxieties, of their triggers and root causes and encouraging myself (using, for example Reiki healing or some form of Mindful Presence) to face the underlying fears and/or to 'accept those things I cannot change'.

It's an on-going process for which there is no quick fix nor magic pill, but with support from those who have been there before and by application of a range of relaxation and self-help techniques then, over the courses of years, progress can be seen.

If IBS is your reality then, paradoxically, facing reality to find the real you is probably the best way forward. Good luck!

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