

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES



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A primary objective of our Center is to provide the most comprehensive evaluation and treatment for the full range of functional gastrointestinal disorders (FGIDs). One of the many ways this is accomplished is through the use of psychological services. Working with a psychologist does not indicate that you have a mental illness. Rather, the psychologists in the center focus on ways of helping you adapt to, cope with and manage your symptoms.

Drs. Burnett and Weinland are licensed clinical psychologists who specialize in behavioral medicine and pain management techniques from a cognitive-behavioral perspective. In addition, they are working within the Functional GI and Motility Program because of their special expertise and interest in working with patients

having functional GI and motility disorders. The cognitive behavioral perspective means that the way in which they approach the assessment, understanding, and treatment of an individual's problem(s) is rooted in the "here and now". The focus in a therapy session is on how a person thinks about, understands, and manages his/her symptoms and their impact on quality of life. As noted, particular emphasis is placed on the pain, nausea, vomiting and associated symptoms of functional GI disorders.

To this end, Drs. Burnett and Weinland are trained in a number of techniques that individuals can learn and utilize (in conjunction with medications prescribed by your physician), to help manage the symptoms of FGIDs. The following sections describe some of the techniques used to manage your symptoms.

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)

Cognitive-behavioral therapy focuses on the inter-relationships between a person's thoughts (cognitions), actions, and feelings (affect or emotions) and the role they play in a person's functional GI symptoms. By focusing on these components, changes can be made in how a person thinks, acts and feels about his/her difficulties. This process can help to reduce the frequency and intensity of GI symptoms. For example, with this type of treatment a person can learn to become less upset when they have a symptom flair-up, and to accept it as a temporary state of discomfort that likely will subside over time. The goal of CBT is not to think positively or negatively about situations, but rather to be more accurate in understanding symptoms, and in making more effective choices of tools and techniques to manage symptoms more effectively.

RELAXATION THERAPY

Relaxation therapies include techniques for helping a person reduce his/her current state of physical and psychological arousal and lowering a person's sense of distress. Among the techniques utilized are progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), autogenic training, breath regulation and mindfulness based meditation. Many of the techniques are familiar to patients and you may have tried some

without even knowing that you were doing them. For example, pulling over to the side of the road and taking several long, deep breaths after skidding on a slippery road is a form of relaxation. With these types of techniques, individuals can learn to “turn down the volume”, on their GI symptoms by becoming more calm and relaxed.

BIOFEEDBACK

If you've ever stepped on a scale, and changed your behavior because of what you saw, you've used a simplified form of biofeedback. It works by giving you visual or auditory representations of physiological processes that are going on in your body that you then pair with exercises you learn to increase your control over those processes. You will be trained to change a specific physical response, for example, fingertip temperature, heart rate variability (HRV) or muscle tension, to reduce undesirable symptoms. Biofeedback has been used to successfully treat many diseases and disorders such as IBS, migraine and tension headaches, hypertension, insomnia, and anxiety. It requires equipment that can be used in a therapist's office, or can be purchased or rented for personal home use. Over time, a person gains sufficient control over his or her physical responses as a way of managing the unpleasant symptoms so that the equipment becomes unnecessary.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

It is well established that many of the symptoms of the functional GI disorders are made worse by stress. Stress is a personal experience, and can range from something as common as having a disagreement with a coworker, spouse or friend to the loss of a job or loved one. Stress management training seeks to help the person understand the role of stress in his/her life and how it relates to the FGID. It also seeks to provide the person with a variety of ways of dealing with these stressful events as they arise in such a way as to minimize their impact on the person's symptoms and quality of life.

HYPNOSIS

Hypnotherapy is a set of techniques designed to help people focus their attention and concentration. This can be accomplished with the aid of a therapist, or by oneself (i.e., self-hypnosis). The state of hypnosis is often described as a very deep relaxation, and narrowing of focus or attention during which a person is open to ideas or concepts that may help him or her manage certain problems. For example, hypnotherapy is useful for coping with pain. Contrary to popular belief, a hypnotized person does not give control of his or her behavior to the hypnotherapist, but gains a deeper level of self-control, attention and concentration.

THE UNC CENTER FOR FUNCTIONAL GI & MOTILITY DISORDERS

For further information about IBS and other functional GI and motility disorders, please visit our website at www.med.unc.edu/ibs.

Our website also provides information regarding opportunities to participate in on-going research studies at UNC.



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To make an appointment at our clinic, please contact 919-966-0141

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