

Help your tummy—get in the swing



PAIN PIONEER

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When you think about easing chronic tummy trouble, hypnotherapy probably isn't the first thing that springs to mind—unless you're Annette Webb.

The number of children with unidentifiable medical problems who suffered from chronic stomach pain was on the rise, and Webb, a children's gut specialist, was at a loss. She and her team felt the time had come to take a totally new approach to the problem.

"We looked at the international literature on effective treatments for irritable-bowel syndrome [IBS], and there didn't appear to be any," Webb says. "Many of the drugs seemed to work for a while, and then wear off."

Then the team found research that showed that a new treatment based on hypnotherapy appeared promising enough to warrant further investigation. The theory behind the treatment is that chronic pain may arise from a lack of regulation of the pain signals being sent between the mind and the gut, resulting in a vicious cycle of pain and distress.

This insight took Webb in a new direction. "I undertook further training as a clinical hypnotherapist, and a whole new world of mind-body medicine opened up for me. I grew to see that complex functional disorders could not be treated as a body-only problem. The interaction of mind, body and emotion needs to be considered."

Predictably, Webb says, she initially faced some obstacles to get hypnotherapy accepted as a mode of treatment. "People were understandably skeptical, as this therapy lay outside the realm of traditional medicine."

However, Webb's research was showing that many children were benefiting from hypnotherapy, a finding supported by a larger study that researchers in the Netherlands were conducting at the same time. This led to the establishment of Australia's first paediatric gut-focused hypnotherapy clinic at The Royal Children's Hospital, and then a few years later, the opening of a second clinic at Monash Children's Southern Health.

And Webb and her team aren't stopping there: they plan to expand and research the effectiveness of hypnotherapy for other chronic gut disorders, such as inflammatory-bowel disease.

TOPTIPS

● FIND THE RIGHT HYPNOTHERAPIST

Look for an appropriately accredited clinical hypnotherapist or psychologist who practises gut-focused hypnotherapy. The practitioner should work with both you and your doctor. Visit the Australian Society of Hypnosis (ozhypnosis.com.au).

● DIG DEEP

Don't forget to take into account that social, emotional and spiritual issues could be contributing to chronic pain. A psychologist can be able to help you find and address any underlying problems that can be factoring in to your pain. **P**



To locate an integrative GP near you, visit the Australasian Integrative Medicine Association website (aima.net.au).

• The Australasian College of
• Nutritional and Environmental Medicine
• (acnem.org) also lists graduate and member
• health professionals.