

Powerful Patient 2009, week 37

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Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Millions of Americans suffer from headaches, stomach problems, and other ailments like shortness of breath, abdominal pain, or even more long-term ailments like eczema and hypoglycemia. What's worse, these ailments often go untreated and undiagnosed because the cause is unclear. According to Dr. Stephen Wangen, the answer for many of these people could be simple food allergy, but it is difficult to detect. Joyce talks with Dr. Wangen about how to approach a discussion of food allergies with your physician.

1) About our Guest

Dr. Steven Wangen is a nationally recognized expert in the field of gluten intolerance, a gluten-intolerant physician himself, and co-founder of the IBS Treatment Center.

He has written a book, *Healthier Without Wheat*.

To contact Dr. Wangen, see his website <http://www.ibstreatmentcenter.com/>

2) About Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a collection of symptoms including headaches, stomach problems, shortness of breath, abdominal pain, or even more long-term ailments like eczema and hypoglycemia. What's worse, these ailments go untreated and undiagnosed because the cause is unclear. There is no single clear cause, this array of symptoms may be caused by several different underlying conditions. The challenge is to identify which one, and take action to alleviate the source of the irritation.

"The answer for many people with IBS could likely be a simple food allergy, but it is difficult to detect," says Dr. Wangen. "The number of people who react to wheat and gluten, and the profound difference seen in their lives when they stop eating them, never ceases to amaze me," Dr. Wangen said. "People need to arm themselves with the facts, and they need to change the way they think about their health so they can address diagnosis and potential treatment with their physicians. With the HMO's attention to the over-utilization of healthcare services, many doctors



Dr. Steven Wangen

and clinics are pressured to move patients through the system quickly, without addressing the patients' needs more creatively. This is why so many people are still sick even after they see their doctor."

Because wheat gluten is such a common ingredient in foods we eat every day - including bread, pizza, pasta and others - it's affects can sometimes go undiagnosed by many people, who just chalk their symptoms up to stress, over-eating or general fatigue.

Dr. Wangen offered some tips for patients seeking answers to their undiagnosed health issues:

- Don't self-diagnose because of TV drug ads - Many pharmaceutical advertisements may describe symptoms similar to yours, but don't be fooled by them and simply ask your doctor for the prescription du jour.
- If traditional treatments haven't worked, then ask your doctor to test for food allergies.
- Ask for Gliadin IgA testing (available from most major labs), Total IgA plus tissue Transglutaminase IgA (tTIGa) test pair (available from most major labs), ELISA (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay) method IgG and IgE testing for gluten or the entire grain (wheat, barley, spelt, kamut, rye, etc.) Some of these tests may not be readily available. If your doctor cannot perform them, find one who will.
- Change your philosophy on health - People's default position should be one of being healthy. Too many people walk around suffering unhealthy symptoms, but don't feel it's important enough to seek a doctor's care for them. They are just "the way I am." In the absence of an identifiable cause, people should generally feel good and be healthy. If you suffer symptoms, make it a point to find out why, and seek out treatment to correct the problem.
- Wellness Visit - Too many people allow the "sicker-quicker" phenomenon to happen to them. Because of the poor economy, many people are working two jobs, and cannot afford to miss work to see their doctor for a wellness visit in order to seek answers to their minor symptoms. What invariably happens is that they wind up getting sicker, and then wind up taking a week off of work to get better. Moreover, the healthcare system moves them through quicker, because of managed care pressures, meaning that many treatments wind up being ineffective anyway.

"Many people know that they have a reaction to wheat or gluten, even though their doctors haven't found any evidence to support the diagnosis," Dr. Wangen said. "Others may just be beginning to suspect that the symptoms they are experiencing are related to their diets. People need to read, research and discover for themselves the information they need to understand and appreciate all forms of wheat and gluten intolerance, as well as more conventional wheat and gluten allergies."

3) Notes for people with VHL

While IBS is not directly connected with VHL, it is common in the general population and might be present in addition to VHL. It should also be noted that pancreatic cysts and tumors can cause

an imbalance of digestive enzymes that are essential for breaking down the foods you eat and deriving the benefit of the “good stuff” in your food. You may be eating it, but is it getting to your cells? If you have IBS symptoms, and especially if you are losing weight – or gaining weight – without trying to do so, you should check with an endocrinologist and ask them to check you for exocrine insufficiency. Under a doctor’s guidance, you may need to take one or more of the pancreatic enzymes by mouth to get your digestion back into balance.

4) Resources on the web

Dr. Wangen’s book: <http://www.healthierwithoutwheat.com>

IBS Treatment Center: <http://www.ibstreatmentcenter.com/>

Nutritional information for people with VHL: <http://vhl.org/nutrition>

Gluten-free recipes: <http://www.glutenfreeenterprises.com>