

Time to 'get gutsy' on Crohn's and colitis



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
Thursday, November 21, 2013 4:38:01 PST PM



(FOTOLIA)

Most everyone knows that this month is Movember, putting the focus on men's health. The public and media attention that has been brought to this is wonderful. Few people, however, know that November is also Crohn's and Colitis Awareness Month, or CACA month for short.

Crohn's and colitis are inflammatory bowel diseases. Symptoms can include abdominal pain, cramping, diarrhea, bowel urgency, nausea, vomiting and weight loss. With colitis there might be blood in the stool. Obviously, during a flare-up, these symptoms can interfere with a person's life, but it may be difficult for them to explain to others why they are tired, grouchy, or perhaps needing to take time off from activities and work.

While bowel health might not be a popular topic for social conversation, one in 150 Canadians is living with one of these diseases. The numbers make them almost as common as the diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes, yet they are much less discussed. Because about 9,000 new patients are diagnosed yearly with an IBD, the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada encourages every Canadian to "get gutsy" this month by learning and talking about the diseases. Check out the foundation for more information.

To manage a disease, many sufferers take pharmaceutical prescriptions, but for those with an IBD, or those wanting to support a healthy gut, there are also natural options that can additionally support, treat and prevent flare ups.

Though not all probiotics studies have shown positive outcomes, some have demonstrated significantly higher remission rates from IBD symptoms. Probiotics are good bacteria that are naturally present in our intestines, but they have been found to be deficient in those with IBDs. While food sources of probiotics include fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, miso, tempeh, and kombucha, some sufferers find a high-quality supplement is needed for best results.

It is best to first determine if there are foods that aggravate your condition. Some common triggers include dairy, caffeine and gassy foods like beans and broccoli, raw fruits and vegetables (try steaming, baking, or stewing them instead), popcorn, and carbonated drinks. Quit smoking is also good and manage your stress, as these can worsen symptoms.

Traditional Chinese medicine uses herbs to decrease gut inflammation, heal the intestinal lining, reduce pain and cramping, and support healthy digestion. Acupuncture can do this too, along with helping to lessen stress.

If your digestive system is distressed, then “get gutsy” and take action.

Melissa Carr is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

Reader's comments »

If you already have an account on this newspaper, you can login to the newspaper to add your comments.

By adding a comment on the site, you accept our terms and conditions and our netiquette rules.