What to Do About MS and GI Discomfort

by ERICA WILSON

MS and Stomach Bloating

Bloating, discomfort, pain and misery. These are a few adjectives that we as multiple sclerosis (MS) patients use on a daily basis. Many maladies cause these feelings, but this article will concentrate on MS and stomach bloating.

What Is Bloating?

Dyspepsia is the technical term for bloating, general gastrointestinal pain and discomfort. Of course, bloating happens even if you do not have MS. Menopause, PMS and diet can cause your midsection to feel and look like a hot air balloon preparing for takeoff. Let's talk about what causes it, some treatments and how to prevent it.

What Causes Dyspepsia in MS?

About 30% of all MS patients suffer from dyspepsia. First, we have to talk about what MS does. Though it is different for everyone, the disease itself wreaks the same havoc on everything it touches.

MS is an autoimmune disease that attacks our central nervous system (CNS). It eats away at the protective covering, called myelin, on our nerves. This attack leaves the nerve endings exposed; therefore it hinders the communication between the brain and spinal cord.

The nerves involved with the gastrointestinal system are the peripheral nerves. When these nerves are attacked, it causes problems like bloating, diarrhea, nausea, trouble swallowing and more.

What Are the Treatment Options?

Holistic Methods

There are several ways to treat MS and stomach bloating. One way, if you prefer a holistic route, is herbal treatment. Iberogast is a mix of herbs in liquid form that has been shown to alleviate the symptoms of dyspepsia. Also, artichoke leaf extract can help reduce abdominal pain.

There are also other herbs that can help:

- Angelica
- Peppermint leaf
- Clown's mustard plant
- German chamomile
- Caraway
- Licorice

- Milk thistle
- Celandine
- Lemon balm

Relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation are also found to be helpful.

Over-the-Counter Medication

If you do not have enough medicine in your diet, there are also over-the-counter remedies:

- Mylanta
- Gas-X
- Tagamet
- Pepcid

Prescription Medication

Your physician may prescribe medications such as:

- Reglan to help empty your stomach
- Low dose antidepressants
- Antibiotics if H. pylori

How to Prevent Bloating

There are a few ways to avoid this abdominal catastrophe altogether. Some are traditional, others may take a little research, a willing physician and a willing insurance company.

The first thing you should try is changing your diet. Try keeping something in your stomach to avoid acid production, avoid foods that may trigger dyspepsia and take your time eating.

The research, willing doctor and insurance company come into play with this next suggestion: a blood test that shows your body's antibodies to foods. It measures the IgG/IgA antibodies which indicate inflammatory response to certain foods.

My Experience with the Blood Test

I personally had this test done years before my diagnosis. My whole body, every joint, hurt to the point that I was in tears at work one day. They sent me to the emergency room, where I was diagnosed with arthritis. I was then sent to a rheumatologist, only to be told I did not have arthritis. She asked if she could do a blood test to help diagnose the source of my pain.

Sure enough, I did not have arthritis, but my body was highly intolerant to wheat and corn. She said wheat and corn were toxic to me. Cutting out those foods (which is nearly impossible) stopped my pain almost immediately. I started eating nothing but fresh fruits and veggies prepared in a number of ways, and all the pain I had went away. No more bloating or discomfort.

The Takeaway

It is amazing how much control we have over many of our symptoms. I've read articles over the years that talk about the importance of gut health. It helps to know which foods are your triggers, so you know what to avoid. Eating healthy for your body is also key. Healthy is not the same for everyone. Wheat and corn are considered healthy foods, but they are toxic to my body.

Also, the IgG/IgA blood test is extremely helpful. Talk to your doctor and find out about it before you try any over

the counter or herbal treatments. There is always a chance of drug interaction, even with natural remedies.

Change your diet by first cutting snacks that are high in fat content, fried foods and any other questionable items you may be putting into your body. It may be difficult to break the unhealthy snack habit at first, but it will be worth it to at least try. If we can eliminate inflammation in our bodies and avoid pain, I am willing to try almost any means necessary.