



NEWSLETTER

Good Science vs. Bad Science

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The IBS Treatment Center is the nation's leading facility for the successful resolution of Irritable Bowel Syndrome. January 2009 Issue. Newsletter Published Monthly.

A recent news item republished in the American College of Gastroenterology's "Digestive Health Smartbrief" provides us with an opportunity to examine the difference between good conclusions and bad conclusions in science. The article was headlined: "Study: No link between allergies, constipation in kids".

This study was done this year on a group of children with chronic constipation. 2,068 children aged 6 months to 6 years were evaluated to determine if they had chronic constipation. 69 children qualified. These children were then tested for cow's milk (dairy) food allergies by measuring IgE antibodies in the blood and/or doing skin-prick tests. Eleven children were found to not respond to laxatives (it didn't relieve their constipation) and only 3 of these had positive tests for a dairy allergy. These 11 children were put on a 4-week dairy-free diet and none improved. The proportion of children with positive dairy allergy test results was approximately equal in the group with chronic constipation and the control group.

The study concluded that a dairy allergy is not associated with chronic constipation in children. This is a statistical statement, but the implication is that chronic constipation isn't caused by dairy allergy – which is what was reported by the press.

What is wrong with this conclusion? Let's take a look at the basic logic. The main issue is that the study was not designed to support the conclusion. The first problem is that they treated the children with laxatives and only those that didn't respond to laxative treatment were given the dairy-free diet. It is difficult to understand the logic behind this decision, since laxatives treat only the symptom of constipation, not the cause. It is even possible that patients with chronic constipation caused by a dairy allergy could be the most likely to respond to laxative therapy. Thus they may have missed testing the right group of kids.

Second, they only used skin prick testing and IgE blood testing. These tests are typically used for assessing conventional food allergies that result in skin rashes and breathing problems. They are often not effective at finding food allergies that cause digestive problems. Therefore the study did not determine the real proportion of children with dairy allergies because they used methods that only measure the most obvious skin and breathing reactions.

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Finally, the study provided a dairy-free diet to only 11 children, and only 3 of them had positive skin or blood tests. And they didn't test these children for all of the other possible food allergies and other conditions that could also be causing constipation. You can read the study abstract (summary) at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18562455?ordinalpos=11&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_DefaultReportPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum

In contrast, a study done in 2001 came to the opposite conclusion, and did so by doing a better job of testing for what they wanted to know. This study was designed to determine if a cow's milk allergy could cause constipation. They identified a group of 25 children with cow's milk allergy by testing (again, only IgE skin and blood testing) and then continued to see if dairy in the diet could trigger the constipation and if a dairy-free diet could resolve it. They put the kids (all of them) on a dairy-free diet for 4 weeks. Constipation disappeared in 7 of the kids (28%) during the dairy-free diet and re-appeared within 48-72 hours of reintroducing dairy into their diet. This is strong evidence – for these 7 children constipation could be turned on and off by adding or removing dairy from their diet. Note that this is only 7 of the 25, but it's over 25%. What is the logical conclusion? In a significant number of cases dairy in the diet is strongly correlated with constipation in children with positive tests for dairy allergy. You can view this study's abstract at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11846872?ordinalpos=210&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_DefaultReportPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum

Both of these studies are relatively small. Neither controlled for other conditions that may cause constipation, which are many and include many other food allergies. And neither tested for IgG reactions to dairy. But at least the second study actually tested to see if dairy in diet could affect constipation in some children. The first study only tested children that were unsuccessfully treated with laxatives. The data from these studies don't conflict – one shows that dairy in the diet can be strongly correlated with chronic constipation in some patients. The other study didn't prove that it can't be, and really didn't do much else either.

Unfortunately, poorly designed studies and unsupported conclusions are not uncommon in science. Even with a well-designed human study, it is very difficult if not impossible to control all of the variables involved. Therefore conclusions must be kept in context and not overblown, but they also shouldn't be underestimated. Dairy allergies can certainly contribute to constipation, as we've seen at our clinic many times. For other interesting studies please visit the Innate Health Foundation research page at http://www.innatehealthfoundation.org/5_c.htm.

Regular Features

January's Product Review Namaste Food Products



Namaste Foods is a small manufacturer of foods that contain no wheat, gluten, corn, soy, potato, dairy, casein or nuts. They make mixes for desserts, breakfast, pastas, breads, pizza and more. To check out their products please find them at <http://namastefoods.com>. Although you can shop online you will find all their locations at <https://www.namastefoods.com/shopping/storefront/cgi-bin/news.cgi?Category=Main%20Page&Function=state>

This reviewer has used various Namaste mixes for 5 years with success. Being only gluten-free, I can use eggs in the mixes. Two families in our office baked with the Namaste Chocolate Cake Mix using egg replacer and the cakes turned out gummy but very chocolaty. Cooking with egg replacer is a challenge and apparently you can bake the mixes with egg replacer if you follow Namaste's instructions on <https://www.namastefoods.com/shopping/storefront/cgi-bin/news.cgi?Category=Frequently%20Asked%20Questions>.

Events

Support Group At IBS Treatment Center

Tuesday May 5th the support group will welcome back Beve Kindblade. Beve is a popular, highly experienced and well-regarded nutritionist practicing here in Seattle. Her decades of experience have made her a noted expert. She gave a fantastic presentation at the January support group. If you missed the last meeting, don't miss her return in May one!

The IBS Treatment Center hosts a support group, open to the public usually on the first Tuesday of every month from 6:30-7:45PM.

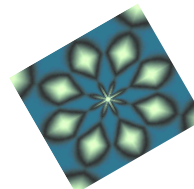
Meet other people with IBS, food allergies, and/or gluten intolerance at these fun and educational events. Dr. Wangen attends most meetings. For more information, please call 206-264-1111.

The Next Meeting Is on February 3, 2009 from 6:30 to 7:45 PM.

Location: IBS Treatment Center, 1229 Madison St. Suite 1220, Seattle, WA 98104

Phone: 206-264-1111 View driving directions at <http://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&hl=en&q=1229+Madison+St.,+Seattle+WA&ll=47.614611,-122.323666&spn=0.026442,0.083256&om=1>

Dr. Wangen's Scheduled Presentations



Dr. Stephen Wangen is starting off the new year with numerous speaking engagements. Some will be available to the general public.

Tuesday, February 10, 2009 at 7:00 PM, Dr. Wangen will do a presentation about IBS treatment to the King County Medical Assistants at Seattle Children's Hospital in room G1026 **for members only**.

Monday, March 9, 2009 at 7:00 PM, Dr. Wangen will be at the University Bookstore, 4326 University Way NE, Seattle doing an author presentation of his new book, "Healthier Without Wheat". **Everyone is welcome to attend.**

Tuesday, March 10, 2009 at 5:30 PM, Dr. Wangen will be a member of the Grand Rounds at Bastyr University concerning IBS treatment. The location of this event is at University House, 4400 Stone Way North in Seattle. **The Grand Rounds are for health care providers only.**

Wednesday, April 15, 2009 at 6:00 PM, Dr. Wangen will discuss his book, "Healthier Without Wheat" at the Seattle Public Library downtown, 1000 4th Ave. **Everyone is welcome to attend.**