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JOURNAL "Alternative and Complementary Therapies".

ARTICLE: Clinical Roundup: Selected Treatment Options for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

TOPIC: Informal Mind–Body Techniques

### Informal Mind–Body Techniques

Anxiety disorders are associated with the worsening of irritable bowel syndrome.<sup>1</sup> Psychoneuroimmunocrinology describes how mental activity affects the body's autonomic, hormonal and immune balance, leading to physiologic responses. Mind–body techniques are based on this knowledge of psychologic and organic interactions. There are formal mind–body systems of treatment, such as meditation, yoga, *t'ai chi*, and progressive relaxation, among many others. However, even fast and inexpensive interventions can improve health outcomes and reduce the need for more-expensive medical treatments.<sup>2</sup>

Superficial relaxation techniques—the simplest way to address mental stress—can promote, at least, temporary relief from mental distress, as the mind becomes temporarily quiet and dulled.<sup>3</sup> I advise my patients to try informal meditative practices inspired by components of the routine of a monastic life: (1) thought transit control (taking 5 minutes to focus breathing and organize the mind); (2) mindfulness (full attention) at daily tasks, such as showering, mopping, driving, etc.; and (3) prayer before eating, expressing gratitude for food, induces mindfulness for this act. Paced breathing—the slow and deep breathing that increases baroreflex sensitivity<sup>4</sup>—may be an informal substitute as well. Inhalation and exhalation for a similar time count may be achieved by a metronome (such as a mobile-phone application), set on 45 beats per minute, with 4

beats up and 4 beats down. Faith-based techniques are also useful; altered states of consciousness can be attained by repetitive prayer.<sup>5</sup>

I see the potential of informal mind–body interventions to support clinical treatment in a paradigm aligned to the *Vis Medicatrix Naturae* ("the healing power of nature"), a guiding principle of Hippocratic medicine. According to this paradigm, organisms can often heal themselves, and the role of the physician is to help this natural tendency.

### References

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