

Abstract

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The Aotearoa Women's Wellness Program for Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a chronic and painful gastrointestinal disorder associated with significantly worse physical functioning (abnormal physiology, visceral hypersensitivity, inflammation, immune dysregulation, microbiome, and malabsorption issues). IBS is influenced by genetic disposition, psychological factors and diet, significantly and adversely affects quality of life⁽¹⁾. Internationally IBS is a common disorder in primary and speciality care affecting 13 to 20% of people⁽²⁾. IBS imposes a significant economic burden to health systems⁽²⁾. The prevalence and economic results of IBS make it a major public health concern. Existing interventions revolve separately around diet (particularly the low FODMAP diet) and stress management. The goal of this project was to create a multimodal lifestyle intervention explicitly designed to enhance the health-related quality of life in women treated for IBS in Aotearoa with the imperative to minimise the risk of IBS recurrence and to reduce the burden of the long-term physical and psychological symptoms. This IBS programme builds on the well-established Women's Wellness Programs (WWP) based at the Health Faculty, University of Technology, Sydney. These are robust and systematic programmes developed within the WWP team which comprises international experts in women's health and chronic conditions, of cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stroke. All WWP employ individually tailored strategies to instil positive behavioural change. They are also designed for virtual delivery through participants' mobile computing devices to ensure regional and rural access. This presentation explains the 'The Aotearoa Women's Wellness Program for IBS' prototype that has been developed. This programme is designed based on the results of a study where IBS participants (n=15) and separately health professionals or researchers (n=15) working in the field of IBS in New Zealand were all asked the same questions about the IBS journey, including diagnosis and treatment. Their responses detailed how IBS adversely affected all aspects of quality of life, raised issues with diagnosis and treatment and articulated desired support approaches. When given information about the WWP and asked to provide feedback on it, all 30 interviewed participants agreed that a WWP health promotion approach for IBS was feasible, relevant, and warranted. Through this feedback the programme was developed. Participants work through the content to address issues such as nutrition, stress management, and physical activity, guided by a health professional with expertise in gut health. Various activities and opportunities to reflect are distributed throughout the programme to identify goals to help participants make and embed appropriate changes in their lifestyles. This new, evidence-based programme for IBS is now available to health professionals working in clinical situations related to gut health in Aotearoa. It gives them the opportunity to redesign care, irrespective of where care is delivered, in a way that is responsive to the needs of people with IBS.

Keywords: Aotearoa; IBS; lifestyle program; Women's Wellness.

Ethics Declaration: Yes

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