

Introduction

Have you experienced fatigue, occasional headaches, or digestive issues? It is not bad enough to go to a hospital, and you have been managing on your own, but you feel jealous of healthy friends, worry that it might never get better, or feel disappointed in yourself that you would perform better if you were healthy.

Even minor health problem could make each day challenging. We have summarized information on the physical and mental issues for those of you who are concerned with minor health issues.

This is for those who are struggling now and for everyone else. Please take a moment to read this pamphlet.



Welcome everyone

[Contact us at Center for Health Sciences and Counseling]

○Mon. – Fri. 9:00-17:00
○<http://www.chc.kyusyu-u.ac.jp/>

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Selfcare series for students

[Student life]

1. Student counseling Q & A
2. How to make small talk
3. How to take tests and make presentations
4. How to not procrastinate
5. How to get over failures
6. How to deal with parents during adolescent year
7. How to control anger
8. Transfer students
9. How to manage your schedule
10. Friendship at the university
11. Quit the university?
12. For students that plan to study abroad

[Mental and physical health]

1. Sleep disorder
2. Headache
3. Anemia
4. Intestinal issues
5. Adjustment disorder
6. Anxiety disorder and panic disorder
7. Cause of depression
8. Symptoms of depression
9. Autonomic nerves and autogenic training
10. Relaxation
11. Health issues associated with smoking
12. Infectious diseases

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Selfcare  For students

Mental and physical health 4

Intestinal issues



This pamphlet summarizes the information necessary for you to manage the mental and physical problems you may encounter. Please refer to this pamphlet as needed.

Kyushu University
Center for Health Sciences and Counseling

Intestinal issues

1. Intestinal issues are issues of the body

The intestine is a very long organ. There are individual differences, but generally, the human small intestine is 6 to 7 m long, while the large intestine is about 1.5 m long. However, this is anatomical length, and in a living body, muscles contract to keep the intestines in the abdomen, making them shorter (especially the small intestine). As it is such a long organ and works continuously to digest and absorb, maintaining a regular bowel movement is not an easy feat. I am sure everyone has experienced constipation or diarrhea. Dehydration or weakened intestinal function can lead to constipation, while stimulants could cause diarrhea. If constipation or diarrhea lasts for a long time, leading to weight loss, or if there is fever, change in stool, or blood, you need to be tested at a hospital or see a specialist.

2. What is irritable bowel syndrome?

① A close link between mind and intestine

If you have recurring diarrhea or constipation, especially when stressed, you may be suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which is a name for diseases caused by an abnormal function of the large intestine or secretory function. It used to be called irritable large intestine syndrome, but it became clear that it involves not only the large intestine but the whole digestive tract; thus, the term large intestine changed to bowel. One may experience stomach pain or diarrhea in stressful situations such as meetings, presentations, or a situation one wishes to avoid. Generally, people do not suffer from a sudden onset of constipation; thus, rapid onsets are usually stomach ache or diarrhea. Since there is no sign such as inflammation or tumor in any test, it is considered a psychosomatic disorder, which refers to “diseases that have psychological and social factors (stressor) closely involved in the onset of a physical

disease, and which include organic or functional impairment.” It excludes mental diseases such as neurosis and depression accompanied with physical symptoms.

In short, not only when there are visible damages (organic disorder), but also if there are problems with functions despite not having any visible abnormality in organs (functional disorder), if stress is involved in the onset or course, it is called psychosomatic disorder.

② Symptoms and the disease

Symptoms of IBS include diarrhea, constipation, stomach ache, and excess gas. It is common in developed nations including Japan. In Japan, 10% to 15% of the population suffers from IBS, which is 1/3 of the patients visiting gastroenterology departments. Depending on the symptoms, it is classified into constipation, diarrhea, and alternating constipation and diarrhea. It is slightly more common in women. Diarrhea is more common in men, while constipation is more common in women. Other than stress, its cause is unknown. However, it has recently been shown that when there is stress, a stress hormone is released from the pituitary gland, which interferes with the intestinal function, leading to symptoms of IBS. As this process repeats, the intestine becomes “hypersensitive” to stimuli, and reacts to minor pain or movement and causes a stress reaction in the brain, enhancing the symptoms. The link between the body and mind has been empirically known for a long time, and it has been said that “fancy may kill or cure.” The progress made in modern medicine is now trying to scientifically elucidate our empirical knowledge.

③ To prevent worsening symptoms

IBS is not a disease that causes any risk of death, but if there are many restrictions in daily lives in order to avoid symptoms, QOL could be affected. Therefore, to improve symptoms, not only regulating the intestinal function with medications but also

examining the lifestyle habits and stress is required. If one cannot change the dietary habits, sleep habits, and the way of thinking, symptoms could repeat. Moreover, forcefully controlling stomach aches, diarrhea, and constipation—expression of stress—through drugs could lead to other symptoms.

3. What is important in treating psychosomatic disorders

The treatment of psychosomatic disorders requires both physical and psychological treatments. In psychological treatment, stress must be removed or managed. Drugs (anti-anxiety drugs, antidepressants, etc.), counseling, relaxation techniques, and support of friends and family may be effective. It is necessary to enjoy hobbies and leisure time. For those who tend to develop psychosomatic disorders, to improve their stress management, they must objectively examine their situation and what is causing stress, and learn to express emotions appropriately, and not accumulate stress.

Masahiro IRIE, March 2016

