

Title: Applying the common-sense model to Irritable Bowel Syndrome: the role of illness and treatment representations.

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Background: Theorised pathways in an 'extended' common-sense model of illness representations (CSM) in those affected by Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) were examined. Analysis contrasted between those using complementary medicines (CAM-users) and those not using CAM (non-users).

Methods: A web-based cross-sectional survey. Participants (n=653) were recruited from an IBS self-help network and other online illness discussion forums and assessed on the IPQ-R, the BMQ-General, the Brief-COPE and IBS-QOL.

Findings: CAM-users reported poorer quality of life compared to non-users. Stronger perceptions of illness consequences and emotional representations were strongly correlated with reduced quality of life and poorer emotional outcomes in both groups. Self-blame and behavioural disengagement partially mediated the pathway from perception to outcome.

Discussion: Findings suggest consistency with CSM theory. The detected influence of representations on quality of life (via coping strategies) suggests health psychologists could address components of illness perceptions to improve quality of life in those affected by IBS.