

Doctor Warns Patients of the Dangers of Taking Antidepressants as Treatment for IBS

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LOS ANGELES -- According to gastroenterologist Mark Pimentel, patients suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) should exercise extreme caution when considering using antidepressants as a treatment for IBS.

IBS is the most common chronic medical condition in the country. It is estimated to affect over 60 million people of all ages. For years, stress has been thought to be the primary cause of most cases of IBS. Therefore, many physicians believed that prescribing antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications was the appropriate treatment.

However, Pimentel states, while the judicious use of antidepressants is sometimes warranted under appropriate circumstances, such as severe anxiety and depression, he warns that in many cases such drugs are being unnecessarily prescribed. Pimentel also believes that since a majority of IBS cases are caused by an overgrowth of bacteria in the small intestine, taking antidepressants will not address the "root cause" of the condition.

Furthermore, recent studies have clearly demonstrated that antidepressants have limited effectiveness in alleviating the symptoms of IBS. There is also another important reason for concern when taking antidepressants -- these drugs can cause serious side effects and can be addictive. According to Joseph Glenmullen, MD, side effects of antidepressants may include dizziness, hallucinations, nausea, and possible neurological damage. For all of these reasons, Pimentel states, "This is why I am so reluctant to prescribe these medications for my IBS patients."

Source: Book Talk