

## Holistic Remedies for Functional Bowel Disorders; Is It Time to Open the Narrative?

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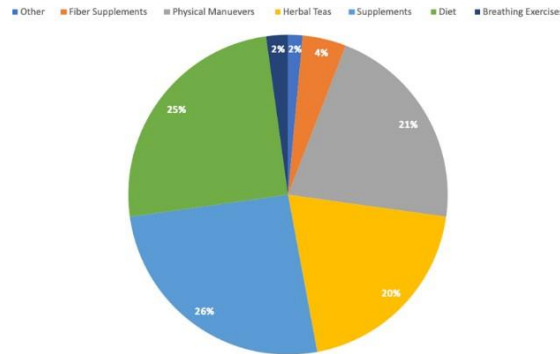
### Letter to the Editor

In the clinical setting, gastroenterologists are often faced with the challenges of managing functional bowel disorders (FBD). Currently there are limited pharmacological and endoscopic interventions available, leading to a historically unhappy patient population. Patients are often left with unanswered questions and pharmacotherapies that may not address all their symptoms. In this digital age, a platform many patients seek as a resource for advice on health is social media. We looked to this space to get a snapshot of what therapies patients are speaking about when it comes to non-pharmacological management of FBD. We chose TikTok as our platform because 44.1 % of users in the United States are 20-39, with 57 % females, very similar to the demographics of patients affected with FBD.<sup>[1,2]</sup> It may come as a surprise to many, but TikTok is a large hub for discussion regarding gastrointestinal issues, with over 6 billion views on gut health related content. We conducted a cross sectional study to evaluate the most popular non-pharmacological remedies for FBD on TikTok. Our focus was to identify and open the narrative regarding the benefits, harms, and scientific backing of the most popular holistic therapies. We evaluated the 200 top viewed videos on TikTok under the keywords; “bloating”, “constipation”, “diarrhea”, and “irritable bowel syndrome”, of which 135 were included in the final analysis. Each video was individually analyzed by two physicians and the mentioned therapeutic approaches were categorized into the following subcategories: supplements, herbal teas, physical maneuvers, diet, fiber supplements, breathing exercises, and other. Exclusion criteria was any video discussing prescription medications or in a language other than English. Within the supplement subcategory, the most frequently mentioned therapy was Pre/Probiotics (6/35, 17%). Among the physical maneuver subcategory, the most frequently mentioned therapy was Acupressure (19/29, 66%). In the herbal tea sub-category there was a tie between ginger tea and peppermint tea (9/27, 33%). In the diet subcategory, there was a tie between kiwi and fermented foods (3/34, 8%).

Is it time to destigmatize holistic therapies in our gastroenterology community? We believe opening the narrative about alternative therapies in academic settings will lead to increased interest in evidence-based research on these holistic therapies, ushering in a new outlook on the treatments available to those suffering from functional bowel disorders. With appropriate research we can determine which therapies are helpful, dangerous, and combat misinformation. Let us look to peppermint oil as an example, once written off due to lack of any evidence-based

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data, and now an official ACG guideline in irritable bowel syndrome management.<sup>[3]</sup> We believe it is imperative that Gastroenterologists be informed about the popular non-pharmacological therapies, while our study is merely a snapshot, further studies are needed to better identify holistic therapies that warrant evidence-based research.



**Figure 1:** Subcategories of the most popular holistic remedies on TikTok

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