

**Peppermint oil for irritable bowel syndrome: A critical review and meta-analysis**

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**Background**

Peppermint oil is the major constituent of several over-the-counter remedies for symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). As the etiology of IBS is not known and treatment is symptomatic there is a ready market for such products. However, evidence to support their use is sparse. The aim of this study was to review the clinical trials of extracts of peppermint (*Mentha X piperita* L.) as a symptomatic treatment for IBS.

**Methods**

Computerised literature searches were performed to identify all randomised controlled trials of peppermint oil for IBS. Databases included Medline, Embase, Biosis, CISCOM and the Cochrane Library. There were no restrictions on the language of publication. Data were extracted in a standardised,

predefined fashion, independently by both authors. Five double-blind, randomised controlled trials were entered into a meta-analysis.

**Results**

Eight randomised controlled trials were located. Collectively they indicate that peppermint oil could be efficacious for symptom relief in IBS. A meta-analysis of five placebo-controlled, double-blind trials seems to support this notion. In view of the methodological flaws associated with most studies, no definitive judgement about efficacy can be given.

**Conclusion**

The role of peppermint oil in the symptomatic treatment of IBS has so far not been established beyond reasonable doubt. Well-designed and carefully executed studies are needed to clarify the issue.