

Reclaim Your Life from IBS

Melissa G. Hunt, PhD

Sterling Publishing Co. (<https://www.sterlingpublishing.com/9781454918875/>): Toronto
2016, 210 pp., \$14.95 List Price (Paperback)

The term “self-help” tends to make mental health professionals squirm a bit. Your typical self-help paperback features exaggerated claims for radical and easy transformation, often without any substantive support and based solely on personal experience or mere speculation from the author. Often vacuous, some of these books can be downright dangerous when they take on more clinical topics without the necessary expertise or caution.

And yet, most of us acknowledge that there is—or ought to be—a place for self-help. If for no other reason than that we often find ourselves sitting across from clients who need help beyond our own expertise and without access to quality referrals. Such is the case for many clinicians whose clients struggle with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Many of us know that IBS is often co-morbid with stress, anxiety, and perhaps other common psychopathologies, and that there may even be a direct connection between mental health struggles and gastrointestinal issues. But when it comes to advising our clients and patients about IBS, we may feel inadequate to the task, opting instead to refer them back to—yet another—medical specialist.

In *Reclaim Your Life From IBS*, Dr. Melissa Hunt has developed a remarkably accessible and comprehensive guide for lay people struggling with IBS. Based on her own clinical research, the book lays out a practical guide for applying principles and techniques of cognitive behavioral therapy to aid in the treatment and management of IBS. And while the book will likely be imminently useful for clients, it perhaps functions on a second level as an ideal template for scientist-practitioners looking to reinvent the mold for a better brand of self-help—one that is accessible in tone and format but also based on the best empirical research available.

In chapters one and two, the author describes the core features and characteristics of IBS and presents an easy-to-understand conceptualization of the biopsychosocial approach to IBS, simultaneously validating the reality of the physical symptoms of IBS and at the same time explaining the psychological and environmental factors that may be maintaining it. From the beginning, the author has a knack for writing in a way that clearly demonstrates her own competence as an expert in the area, which will undoubtedly inspire a high degree of confidence from her readers. And yet, she manages to do so with a wonderfully warm and humane tone, often injecting bits of humor and everyday examples when appropriate.

The remainder of the book is devoted to introducing the reader to core principles and techniques from cognitive behavioral therapy and explaining how they might be applied to the unique struggles of clients with IBS. Covering topics from Relaxation Training and Behavioral Experiments to The Cognitive Model and the relationship between diet and IBS, the book manages to cover quite a bit of ground while maintaining a brisk pace that will keep it engaging and readable to a broad audience with little to no formal training in or understanding of either CBT or IBS. Each chapter is relatively brief and concise and ends quite helpfully with a summary of the key ideas plus practical “suggested activities” for readers to implement.

Grounded in solid empirical research and thoughtful clinical practice—and written with an ease and clarity that should appeal to a wide range of readers—*Reclaim Your Life from IBS* is an invaluable book for laypeople and clinicians alike. Dr. Melissa Hunt has done important work

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Book Reviews
2018, Vol. 14 No. 2

developing a cognitive behavioral approach to treating IBS and managed to package that work into a concise, readable, and thoroughly practical book for anyone who struggles with IBS.

Nicholas D. Wignall, Ph.D., ABPP
Diplomate, American Board of Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology
Supervising Psychologist
Cognitive Behavioral Institute of Albuquerque