Background: An estimated 7-10% of the world population suffers from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), a disease that greatly affects the daily life and the quality of life of the afflicted. The total annual health care cost of IBS is around 1280 billion Swedish crowns. IBS is characterized by abdominal pain/discomfort in combination with diarrhoea, constipation, or a combination of these. The etiology is unknown but it is believed that there are several factors that come into play. The disease cannot be cured, but there are ways to alleviate the symptoms through a variety of medicinal preparations and dietary treatment. Peppermint oil has long been used in various types of stomach problems and in recent years scientists have begun to understand how and why this works. The question is whether this can help even with IBS?

Objective: To examine the scientific evidence for IBS treatment with peppermint oil (PMO).

Search strategy: A systematic literature search was made in PubMed, Scopus, and Cochrane. Keywords used were: IBS and treatment and peppermint oil, peppermint oil and spasmolytic.

Selection criteria: Randomized controlled studies, human studies, IBS studies in an otherwise healthy population, studies on PMOs antispasmodic effect.

Data collection and analysis: Six original articles were selected and reviewed by the SBU audit template for randomized controlled trials. The strength of evidence was determined using the GRADE system.

Main results: Treatment of IBS with PMO has better effect than placebo on certain symptoms, particularly abdominal pain. The evidence for this is assessed as moderate (+ + +). PMO as antispasmodics work just as well or better than conventional medicines during endoscopic procedures. The evidence for this is assessed as moderate (+ + +).

Conclusions: There is moderate evidence (+ + +) that PMO has demonstrated superiority over placebo in the treatment of IBS-related abdominal pain. Similarly, there is moderate evidence (+ + +) that PMOs function as antispasmodics are as good as or better than the conventional drugs. There is a need for more, longer, well-conducted studies in these areas.