



HEALTH AWARENESS

Understanding Irritable Bowel Syndrome

(NAPSA)—For the millions of Americans who experience a common gastrointestinal disorder, there is encouraging news: The condition is readily manageable and does not cause permanent harm to the intestines or lead to more serious conditions.

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a common disorder of the intestines that leads to crampy pain, gassiness, bloating and changes in bowel habits. The cause of IBS is not known and as yet there is no cure. Fortunately, most people with IBS are able to control their symptoms through diet, stress management and sometimes with medication prescribed by their physician.

IBS triggers

According to the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA), a person with IBS generally has a colon that is more sensitive and reactive than usual, so it responds strongly to stimuli that would not bother most people, including:

- Ordinary events such as eating and distension from gas or other material in the colon
- Certain medicines and foods
- Chocolate milk products or large amounts of alcohol
- Caffeine.

Women with IBS may have more symptoms during their menstrual periods.

“For many people, eating a proper diet lessens IBS symptoms,” explains Joanne A.P. Wil-



There are a number of lifestyle changes people can make to reduce symptoms of IBS.

son, MD, AGAF, Duke University Medical Center. “Before changing your diet, it is a good idea to keep a journal noting which foods seem to cause distress. Discuss your findings with your doctor.”

For instance, if dairy products cause your symptoms to flare up, you can try eating less of those foods. Yogurt might be better tolerated because it contains organisms that supply lactase, the enzyme needed to digest lactose, the sugar found in milk products. Also, insoluble dietary fiber—found in whole-grain breads, cereals and beans—helps move bulk through the intestines and promotes healthy bowel movements, potentially lessening IBS symptoms.

For more information on digestive health, tests performed by gastroenterologists and to find an AGA member physician in your area, visit www.gastro.org/patient.



Note to Editors: April is IBS Awareness Month.