



## spotlight on health

### IBS Information And Support Available Through Toll-Free Hotline

(NAPSA)—There's encouraging news for the estimated 30 million Americans who suffer from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a disturbance of colon function characterized by abdominal discomfort, bloating and altered bowel habits. Symptoms of the condition are treatable, making it possible to maintain a normal quality of life.

IBS affects approximately 15 to 20 percent of the general population and is the most common disease diagnosed by physicians. It is a leading cause of absenteeism from work and, although the condition is not life-threatening, can severely impact a person's daily activities and performance.

The symptoms of IBS are wide-ranging. They include chronic diarrhea or constipation and abdominal pain. Patients may feel a sensation of not being able to fully empty their bowels. Other symptoms include gas and bloating, as well as nausea.

"Almost everyone experiences an occasional bout with abdominal pain and diarrhea or constipation and people may view these symptoms as normal," said Nancy Norton, President and Founder of the International Foundation for

Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD). "However, when these symptoms are chronic or recurring, or when they interrupt daily activities, they may signal IBS."

Factors that can aggravate IBS include stress, anxiety, diet and, in women, their menstrual cycle. Though there is no cure, IBS is treatable. Effective diagnosis and treatment begins with education about the nature of the disorder.

"People need to recognize the symptoms of IBS and effectively communicate them with their physician. For some, IBS can be a severely debilitating condition," said Dr. Douglas A. Drossman, M.D., Co-Director, UNC Center for Functional GI and Motility Disorders and Professor of Medicine and Psychiatry, Division of Digestive Diseases, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "While there is no cure for IBS, if it is properly diagnosed and treated, a person's quality of life can improve dramatically."

The International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) has a toll-free number available for those who may be suffering from the symp-



toms of IBS. People may call 1-888-964-2001, 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST, to receive information and support regarding the condition. Informational materials are available, including a daily diary, which can be used to keep track of specific symptoms and circumstances surrounding IBS. The diary can serve as a valuable tool when discussing symptoms with a physician.

The IFFGD is a nonprofit education and research organization whose mission is to inform, assist and support those affected by gastrointestinal disorders. For more information on IFFGD, visit their Web site at [www.iffgd.org](http://www.iffgd.org). To learn more about IBS, visit [www.aboutibs.org](http://www.aboutibs.org).

#### **If you suffer from IBS, the following rules could help improve your quality of life:**

1. If your physician has made a diagnosis, stop worrying about whether it's something else.
2. Avoid things that you know make your condition worse, such as a particular food.
3. Use medications to avoid crises. For example, take an anti-diarrheal before leaving home if you are worried about needing to use the bathroom when facilities are absent.
4. Avoid constipation with bulking agents (provided they don't upset your system). Effective medications are also available which relieve pain and improve changes in bowel habit. Talk to your physician about which treatments are most appropriate.
5. Look for the sources of stress in your life, and see if you can do something to alleviate them.
6. Learn to relax. Most people don't know how. Exercise, yoga, relaxation and understanding yourself are the best methods. In some cases, get help from a trained professional.
7. Don't let your symptoms run your life. Life is much easier once you put in perspective that you can be in charge.



*Note to Editors: April is Irritable Bowel Syndrome Month.*