

# Bringing One Of America's Most Common Health Issues To Light

## Understanding IBS Reduces Stigma Associated With Condition, Helps Sufferers Get Treatment

(NAPSA)—Open and honest conversation about medical conditions once viewed as taboo is becoming more common in the mainstream media and in personal discussions. Yet there's one condition many still consider too personal to talk about—Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). Characterized by chronic or recurring abdominal pain or discomfort associated with a change in bowel pattern, such as diarrhea or constipation, IBS is suffered by many, yet talked about by few.

"Despite being very common, only a small portion of people with symptoms of IBS actually seek medical advice for their condition," says Dr. Lin Chang, Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Digestive Diseases at UCLA; Co-Director of the Center for Neurovisceral Sciences & Women's Health and Director of the Women's Digestive Health Center at UCLA. "IBS is a complex disorder that can be difficult to treat without the proper diagnosis and guidance from a medical professional. With recent advances in understanding IBS, and increased awareness and education among health care providers, individuals with symptoms of IBS should feel encouraged to seek medical attention."

IBS sufferers, Chang notes, may feel stigmatized, because they don't know what's wrong and don't feel comfortable talking about the prob-

lem, or they feel isolated because they think they're the only ones who experience the pain and discomfort associated with the condition. The reality is that IBS is one of the most common disorders seen by primary care physicians, affecting 10 to 20 percent of the general population.

**"The physical and emotional toll of Irritable Bowel Syndrome can be so great, that many people who have it are not able to enjoy normal, active lives."**



In addition to causing pain and discomfort, IBS can have a major impact on quality of life. Two-thirds of respondents in a survey of IBS sufferers conducted by the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) said that IBS interfered with their work or activities with friends or family.

"For people affected by IBS, the prospect of traveling or spending time with family and friends can be so daunting that many don't even consider leaving their comfort zones," said Nancy Norton, IFFGD President and Founder. "The physical and emotional toll of IBS can be so great, that many



people who have it are not able to enjoy normal, active lives."

An IFFGD survey of U.S. adults revealed that 48 percent of sufferers had changed social and travel plans because of their symptoms. Among those, 72 percent canceled social plans an average of 13 times during the previous year and 58 percent avoided travel in the previous year. Less than one in five people with symptoms suggesting IBS were diagnosed with the condition.

"The many people who suffer in silence with IBS need to be heard," said Norton. "Greater awareness will lead to support and better care—and reduce the stigma often associated with this condition."

"Ideally, IBS will become just another topic people discuss without reservation," Norton concluded.

For more information about IBS visit [www.aboutibs.org](http://www.aboutibs.org) or call IFFGD toll-free at 1-888-964-2001.