



# spotlight on health

## Living With An Incurable Sexually Transmitted Disease One Woman Speaks Out

(NAPSA)—Imagine going to your doctor for what you thought was a routine visit and finding out you have genital herpes, an incurable, sexually transmitted disease (STD). Such is the story of Gina Solis, who was engaged to be married and had just started a new job when she was diagnosed with the disease.

“When I first found out I had genital herpes, I thought it was a death sentence,” Gina recalls. “I felt so devastated and alone. I never expected this could happen to me. After my diagnosis I thought my social and sex lives would be ruined forever.”

In addition to feeling emotionally isolated, Gina experienced severe physical symptoms, including monthly outbreaks of itching, burning, painful open sores and tingling and numbness on the back of her legs. “I was having so many painful outbreaks that I lost my job because of missing work so much,” Gina added.

Gina received support and treatment from her physician. She also began exploring the Internet for information on genital herpes. Sites like [www.genitalherpes.com](http://www.genitalherpes.com) helped her realize that the disease is much more common than she thought. More than one in five, or 50 million, Americans have genital herpes. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention predicts one million new cases of genital herpes occur each year, making it the most common STD in the United States.

Although there is no cure for genital herpes, there are treatments available that can help many people relieve symptoms and when used continuously may reduce the number of outbreaks. Gina’s condition improved after her doctor prescribed Famvir® (famciclovir), an oral antiviral medication approved for the episodic and suppressive treatment of recurrent genital herpes in healthy patients. The efficacy of Famvir has not been established for the treatment of initial outbreak of genital herpes.

“For many people, taking oral antiviral medications such as Famvir can significantly relieve patients’ symptoms,” said Dr. Hilary Baldwin, vice-chair and associate professor of clinical dermatology at the State University



**Gina Solis**

of New York (SUNY) Health and Science Center in Brooklyn. “Research shows that many patients taking Famvir daily may go almost a year without experiencing an outbreak, compared with patients taking a sugar pill. Although results vary, Gina went from experiencing severe monthly outbreaks to only two minor outbreaks in a year.”

Today, Gina is stepping out of the shadows to let other sufferers know they are not alone. “I think a lack of education is why there is a negative stigma surrounding genital herpes,” she stated. In fact, Gina has started her own support group. She hopes she can reach out to those living with genital herpes to help them cope with many of the same physical and emotional issues she faced.

“I went through months of pain, embarrassment and shame before I realized that genital herpes could be managed,” added Gina. “Once I got my outbreaks under control with medication, I was able to move on with my life. Today, I am in a new relationship and pursuing my dream career. I’m proof that life can go on with herpes.”

In clinical studies with Famvir, the most commonly reported side effects included headache, nausea and diarrhea. No medication has been proven to prevent the spread of genital herpes to other people. There is no cure for genital herpes.

For more information about genital herpes, call the American Social Health Association at 1-877-411-HERPES or visit [www.genitalherpes.com](http://www.genitalherpes.com), where you can participate in a survey for people living with genital herpes.