



Health Awareness

Differentiating Gut Feelings: IBS vs. IBD

(NAPSA)—Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) are gastrointestinal conditions that can produce similar symptoms, but are very different illnesses and require very different treatments.

IBS, or what many refer to as an irritable or spastic colon, affects as many as one in five Americans. Sufferers of IBS may experience symptoms such as chronic abdominal pain, diarrhea, bloating and constipation.

Generally classified as a “functional” disorder, IBS is a disease with no known organic cause. Symptoms result from a disturbance in the functioning of the large intestine, which in turn can alter bowel activity.

IBD includes two chronic diseases that cause inflammation of the intestinal tract: Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis. Crohn’s disease, for which no cure currently exists, can affect any portion of the digestive tract (organs through which food passes) but is most common in the lower part of the small intestine and the colon. The condition often causes abdominal cramping, diarrhea, fever, weight loss and other symptoms. Crohn’s disease is marked by “flare-ups,” when patients experience symptoms, and periods of “remission,” when symptoms are minimized. Up to three out of four people with Crohn’s disease may require

IBS and IBD share common symptoms, but have important differences:

IBS

- Functional disorder
- Sometimes referred to as a “nervous stomach”
- Treated with diet changes, stress management techniques and medication

IBD

- Digestive tract disease
- Includes Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis
- Treated with medication and/or surgery (Ⓜ)

Irritable bowel syndrome can be treated by restricting a person’s diet and finding ways to reduce stress.

surgery at some time in their lives to reduce severe symptoms or manage disease complications.

The second disease of IBD, ulcerative colitis, affects only the colon. In contrast to the extensive inflammation seen in Crohn’s, only the lining of the intestinal wall becomes inflamed. Surgical removal of the large intestine is considered curative of ulcerative colitis. Both Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis exhibit many of the same symptoms, including diarrhea, weight loss and abdominal pain.

Although IBS and IBD share many of the same symptoms, IBD is a far more serious, chronic disease that may cause permanent damage and lead to serious com-

plications. Accurate diagnosis is crucial because treatment of each disease varies greatly.

IBS can be treated by restricting a person’s diet, finding ways to reduce stress and taking prescription or over-the-counter medications such as laxatives, tranquilizers, anti-diarrheal or even anti-depressant drugs. Although rare, some of the complications of IBD can be life threatening, and IBD usually requires long-term treatment with medications. There are a number of different medications that have proven effective in helping to control the disease. They work to control inflammation, block or decrease immune system activity or reduce intestinal bacteria. One type of medication is a biologic therapy that blocks a protein called tumor necrosis factor (TNF) and prevents it from causing inflammation.

“There is a need for IBS and IBD sufferers to better understand the difference between the two conditions,” says Rodger DeRose of the Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation of America (CCFA). “Although they share common symptoms, IBS and IBD require very different treatments—stressing the importance of an accurate diagnosis.”

For information about IBS and IBD, please visit the CCFA Web site at www.ccfa.org.