

HEALTH ALERT!

Irritable Bowel Syndrome: It's About Lost Potential

(NAPSA)—Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is America's hidden health problem. It is a chronic, recurring disease that affects more than 30 million men, women and children—10 to 20 percent of the U.S. population—yet less than half of these patients seek treatment from a healthcare professional. The disease is a leading cause of worker absenteeism and is one of the foremost reasons for consultation with a physician. Part of the burden of IBS comes from living in a society where the word “bowel” may scarcely be spoken and the nature of IBS symptoms makes it difficult to talk about.

IBS is a disturbance in the regulation of colon function that results in unusual sensitivity and muscle activity. The disease is characterized by abdominal pain or discomfort and abnormal bowel function which may include chronic diarrhea, chronic constipation, or an alternating pattern of both. Patients may feel a sensation of not being able to fully empty their bowels. Other symptoms may include gas and bloating, as well as nausea.

“Almost everyone experiences an occasional bout with abdominal pain and diarrhea or constipation,” said Nancy Norton, President 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.”

IBS severely impacts a person's overall quality of life. The unpredictable nature of the disease can be debilitating and it is frequently difficult to ease the pain that may repeatedly occur throughout the day. One becomes reluctant to eat for fear that a meal will trigger symptoms. Many sufferers become anxious about leaving their homes. They may become afraid to switch jobs, go to a restaurant, travel or have almost any type of social life because they are worried they will not have a bathroom available.

“The human impact of IBS is tremendous. Chronic and recurrent symptoms of IBS can disrupt personal and professional activities, upset emotional well-being and limit individual potential,” commented Nancy Norton.

There is currently no cure for IBS nor an approved, effective treatment. Diagnosis is often difficult because IBS does not show any sign of damage to the colon. Proper treatment begins with opening the lines of communication between the patient and the healthcare professional.

“At this time, there is no cure for IBS,” said Norton. “It is imperative that the best ways to manage and treat this disease are made available to patients. Proper diagnosis by a knowledgeable healthcare professional is essential.”

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

1. Begin by educating yourself about IBS—symptoms can be mild, moderate or severe. They can be chronic, intermittent or variable, and may be manageable.
2. If your healthcare provider has made a diagnosis of IBS, stop worrying that it is “something else.”
3. Use a diary for a week or two to identify factors that might make your condition worse, such as a particular food. Limit intake of high fat food, alcohol and caffeine.
4. Under the guidance of a healthcare professional, use medications to avoid crises. For example, take an anti-diarrheal before leaving home if you are worried about needing to use the bathroom.
5. Stress does not cause IBS but in some people can make symptoms worse. Look for the sources of stress in your life and try to determine how you can alleviate them.
6. Avoid constipation with bulking agents (provided they don't upset your system).
7. Talk to your healthcare professional about treatment goals, which treatments may be appropriate and what to do for severe pain. Working in partnership with your doctor helps obtain the best possible results.



IFFGD is a nonprofit education and research organization whose mission it is to inform, assist and support those affected by gastrointestinal disorders. For more information on IFFGD call 1-888-964-2001 or visit www.iffgd.org.