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Grammers speak up about a problem that 20% of adults endure

Bob Dole made talking about erectile dysfunction a little more tolerable.

June Allyson worked to take the shame out of incontinence.

Now, Kelsey and Camille Grammer want to do the same for a topic that most people would rather keep behind a closed bathroom door: irritable bowel syndrome.

The two are working with the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders to shed light on a problem that affects about one out of five adults. A public service announcement featuring the Grammers are beginning to air nationwide on television and radio stations.

"There are so many people who suffer alone, and they shouldn't be embarrassed to talk about it," says Camille, who was diagnosed about 3½ years ago but has dealt with the problem for more than seven years.

The star of *Frasier* joined the cause to support his wife of almost three years.



By Dan MacMedan, USA TODAY

Enlisted: Kelsey Grammer has joined the cause to support wife Camille, who suffers from IBS.

"This is something that couples deal with together," he says. "There were times when I thought she was going to die because I'd see the pain she was in. I was scared for her health."

Irritable bowel syndrome often alternates between constipation and diarrhea, usually coupled with abdominal pain, gas and bloating. An exact cause has not been pinpointed, but many doctors suggest it is stress-induced, while others

say it can be triggered by spicy foods, lack of dietary fiber and excessive caffeine consumption.

It's different from the occasional upset stomach that everyone experiences, says Nancy Norton, founder and president of the foundation.

"This is a chronic disorder," she says. "When a person has IBS, their life starts revolving around their symptoms. They won't eat in a restaurant, or they'll wait several hours before leaving their house just to be near a bathroom."

"My husband's lifestyle is such that he needs to travel," Camille Grammer says. "I want to be there with him, but I can't always go because I'm not feeling well."

Norton says that having the Grammers talk openly about IBS will help get more people to see their doctors. And, because the Grammers are not embarrassed about the condition, other people won't be either, she says. "It's not a laughing matter for the people who live with this. To them, it's completely debilitating."

The couple decided to speak out when, during a radio interview, Camille mentioned she suffered from IBS. The two were bombarded with e-mail from listeners.

"That encouraged us, and one thing led to another," the actor says. "I have a public persona, and I may as well do something good with it."

By Maribel Villalva