

'Bloating, lethargy and baffled medics'

When Kim Carillo, 53, found her stomach swelling and memory diminishing she blamed the menopause, but then things got a whole lot worse ...

I t all began with the bloat. I'd wake up with a flat stomach but by mid-morning, I'd morphed into Octomum. Constipation was another issue. However much I upped my fibre and water intake, nothing seemed to help. Various web searches reassured me that these were common menopausal complaints so I'd grab some Senokot and keep going.

Then the memory glitches started. On more than one occasion I'd be unpacking the groceries when it dawned on me that my dog, Bailey, was still tied to a pole outside the supermarket! Again I put it all down to menopause and hoped it was just temporary.

Things came to a head after returning from a wonderful holiday in Majorca. I suddenly developed an intolerance to just about everything I ate. My throat felt like it was on fire and my tongue was permanently coated white. My energy levels slumped and my muscles and joints ached constantly.

My GP diagnosed acid reflux and prescribed proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), which is a standard treatment, but said he didn't think my other symptoms were connected and it was probably the menopause. Three days later I had a really severe reaction to the medication and my leg muscles went into agonising cramps. My doctor wasn't

convinced the PPIs were responsible but referred me to a gastroenterologist.

I stopped the PPIs and had a battery of tests, including stomach, liver and pancreas scans. I had a gastroscopy, where a tube with a camera was fed down my throat and into my stomach to look around and take biopsies. It came back normal and of course I was hugely relieved. But then my consultant added, "The latest research indicates that your symptoms could be a sign of ovarian cancer." Help. Yet another scan. By this stage I'd whipped myself into a bit of a frenzy, lying awake at night mentally rewriting my last will and testament. Thankfully the results again came back clear.

Now six months on I was still bloated and constantly muzzy-headed. My joints and muscles were aching more than ever and, disturbingly, my hair was falling out. I'd developed a deep chest cough and I'd also lost a stone (which was the only plus), but we were no closer to a diagnosis. My >>

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energy levels had declined to a point where it was a struggle to get off the couch.

I went back to my GP who, after inspecting my tongue suggested, "Maybe you sleep with your mouth open?" at which point I realised I was on my own! A friend suggested I see naturopathic nutritional therapist Justine Evans, who specialises in women's health and integrates orthodox and holistic medicine.

My first consultation took an hour and a half and cost £120 while she took a detailed history of my various symptoms and the tests and investigations. Justine explained that the gut is highly complex and when the digestive system is out of kilter it can affect every organ in your body, including the brain. While she often refers her clients to GPs and the NHS, she suggested I have a stool analysis run at a local private laboratory, which would give a comprehensive look at the overall health of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. At around £250 it wouldn't be cheap but by this stage I would have sold everything I owned to get my health back.

But first Justine handed me a glass of water mixed with two tsps of bicarbonate of soda and told me to drink

it. If I had a decent amount of stomach acid I should have been burping uncontrollably after five to ten minutes, but I didn't manage a single burp which indicated I was likely low in acid, a condition known as hypochlorhydria, which can be serious. Finally I had an idea of why I might be ill.

Two weeks later my lab results confirmed it. While it's usual to have a variety of bacteria in the gut I had too much streptococcus bacteria and, more shockingly, Justine told me I had a parasite! Images of a 30ft worm wreaking havoc in my intestine sprang to mind. Justine assured me that everyone has exposure to parasites through water, food contaminates, foreign travel and a host of other reasons but when our digestive and

What the experts say...

✦ **Dr Anton Emmanuel, a consultant gastroenterologist and lecturer at UCLH, says: "low stomach acid is probably more prevalent than we realise as patients can present with the same symptoms as those suffering with too much acid. The bicarb of soda test is worth trying in the first instance if you suspect low acid secretion. Do it first thing in the morning before you eat or drink. Two tsps of bicarb in a glass of water. However people should always see their GP if they're worried about symptoms."**

✦ **Justine Evans, a naturopathic nutritionist and Member of the British Association for Applied Nutrition & Nutritional Therapy (BANT) and the Complementary Therapists Association (CTHA), adds: 'Drinking while eating reduces absorption of nutrients and dilutes stomach acid. Leave at least 15 minutes after a meal before drinking.'**

✦ **Visit justineevans.co.uk or check with the Naturopathic Nutrition Association for a therapist near you; see nna-uk.com, bant.org.uk or ctha.com. Initial consultation varies from £70 to £130, further sessions about £50, plus the price of any tests and supplements.**

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immune systems or stomach acid is compromised, they multiply. Mine were invisible to the eye but there were too many of them in my gut and there was a reason for it.

Without adequate stomach acid my body had been unable to break down carbs, protein and fat into the essential nutrients my body needed, or kill off excess bacteria and parasites introduced to us through environment and food. Over time my adrenals had become depleted resulting in adrenal fatigue. I'd also become mineral deficient.

I realised why taking PPIs had given me painful muscle cramps. I was already low on acid and the medication had

reduced it even further. It was such a relief to know that my symptoms were connected.

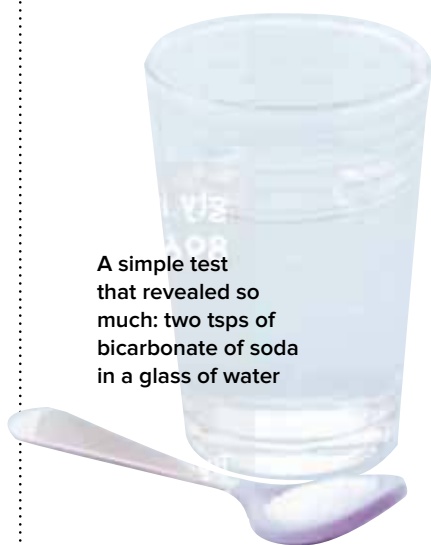
Justine devised a diet regime eliminating refined foods, gluten and simple sugars to reduce gut fermentation and help remove the offending bacteria, fungals and parasites. It meant eating fresh vegetables, lean fresh protein and plenty of water rather than fizzy drinks, alcohol and coffee. Fruit was off the menu for a while, too, as even natural sugars feed the bacteria.

Justine introduced digestive enzymes and explained the importance of relaxing when I ate and chewing my food properly.

She restored specific bacteria which were lacking in my gut with a course of probiotic capsules. I also had magnesium, vitamin C, D and calcium supplements, costing another £200 for a two-month supply.

It was a slow process but little by little I started getting stronger. Six months later and I'm feeling better and more energised than I did in my thirties. As for my brain power... I feel as though someone has reached into my head and pulled out a big ball of cotton wool. I can suddenly think clearly again.

Of course I'm so glad my GP sent me for extensive tests which thankfully ruled out life-threatening conditions and anyone with similar symptoms should always see their doctor. However I can't help feeling it's somewhat ironic that it was a humble dose of bicarb of soda that helped point the way to solving my mysterious symptoms! **w&h**



A simple test that revealed so much: two tsps of bicarbonate of soda in a glass of water