

Picture: MATT WRITTLE



**REMEDY:**  
Rachael eliminated wheat, cow's milk and citrus fruit from her diet

**L**AST summer, I woke up with terribly itchy feet. I wasn't suffering from a bout of wanderlust but an irresistible urge to scratch them. Both my knee and elbow joints were in agony but I put it down to having slept in an awkward position.

Slowly, the pain began to migrate around my body. One day my knees would suffer, the next day it would be my upper left arm and then maybe my right hand. Stairs became my bête noire and walking down them was agony. I couldn't kneel or cross my legs and had to lift them out of bed in the morning.

I thought of myself as a reasonably fit 39-year-old but I went from being very active to completely sedentary overnight.

Despite moving from Maidenhead in Berkshire to London some years before, I still hadn't registered with a local doctor so I decided to go to an NHS Walk-in Centre.

When a nurse told me it could be rheumatoid arthritis or malaria, I panicked and without making an appointment, drove 30 miles to my childhood GP. There I was given blood tests for

**'It took an hour just to crawl out of bed'**

rheumatoid arthritis. This condition occurs when the body's immune system attacks the joints, making them swollen and painful. I was also tested for kidney function and anaemia but all three came back negative. He then prescribed painkillers and referred me to a rheumatologist.

A few days later my left ankle became hot, extremely painful and swelled up to more than twice its normal size. The following morning I woke up feeling as though someone was trying to saw my left foot off. It took an hour just to crawl out of bed to get my painkillers.

I started to panic. If the pain was this bad after just a few weeks, how would I feel in a few months? Would I still be able to walk?

The rheumatologist took more blood tests, which again came back negative. Baffled as to what was causing my symptoms, he ordered more tests and these came back showing a significantly raised amount of C-reactive protein (CRP), which indicated an infection or inflammation in the body.

At last I had proof that something wasn't right.

In the meantime, not only was I in agony but the painkillers were starting to have nasty side-effects. My brain refused to function in the way it used to. When someone asked me a question it was as if a little old librarian shuffled off to the relevant aisle to find the information, only to take so long that I had forgotten what I originally wanted it for.

A friend was convinced my joint problems were linked to my ongoing irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). This can manifest itself in a combination of abdominal pain, constipation and diarrhoea

and up to one in five people in the UK are affected.

She suggested I contact a naturopath called Dr Harald Gaier. He's known as the "medical detective" in alternative medicine circles and believes there are non-orthodox treatments for virtually any disorder.

Immediately, he connected my pain and swelling to my IBS. He asked if I had mood swings, congested sinuses, poor memory and whether I bruised easily.

When I said I did, he suggested that the root of my trouble might be gut dysbiosis, a condition commonly related to IBS. He explained that this meant the balance of good and bad bacteria in my intestines had altered and it was full of parasitic bacteria.

This harmful bacteria destroys the lining of the intestines, making it more porous and leaky. This results in some food particles and waste products that should normally be excreted, being absorbed and entering the bloodstream.

Basically, my own body was poisoning me and this was causing the swelling and joint pain.

According to Dr Rajendra Sharma, the medical director of London's Diagnostic Clinic which combines conventional and complementary medicine, gut dysbiosis can be associated with

**'Months of food purgatory were worthwhile'**

a vast range of illnesses. He adds that many people with arthritis recognise that certain foods can trigger a worsening of their symptoms.

Dr Gaier suggested taking a combination of herbal remedies and a probiotic containing "good" bacteria, to repair the holes in my intestine lining. He said I could starve the unwanted bacteria by going on a strict diet. I was to have no sugars, wheat, cow's milk products, yeast or citrus fruit.

In the meantime I had a sigmoidoscopy, an exploratory examination of my intestines, to see if there was anything more serious. I was diagnosed with an inflamed bowel, which could mean the beginning of Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. They also found a polyp - an abnormal growth in my colon - which could turn cancerous over time but doctors refused to consider that it might be linked to my joint pain.

I've been on the diet for six months now and the joint pain and IBS attacks are infrequent. I rarely need painkillers and after a second intestinal examination and biopsy the results have come back negative.

I'm gradually reintroducing banned foods and if I have an adverse reaction then I'll eliminate them for ever. The months of food purgatory turned out to be worthwhile.

In the end, it seems that all the pain and anxiety I suffered was linked with my IBS. I just wish the connection had been made sooner.

● For more information on gut dysbiosis contact Core, the Digestive Disorders Foundation on [www.corecharity.org.uk](http://www.corecharity.org.uk) or e-mail [info@corecharity.org.uk](mailto:info@corecharity.org.uk)

# How I solved my MEDICAL MYSTERY

For more than six months, RACHAEL SCOTT endured excruciating leg and joint pain while doctors failed to diagnose what was causing it. Here she explains how the riddle of her illness was finally resolved