

The daily dose of friendly bacteria that lets me forget about my IBS

By **Eifion Rees**

Bread, pasta, coffee, wine, cheese, even honey – as any sufferer will attest, the list of foods that can trigger irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is depressingly long.

And even if those who are blighted by the problem manage to live a wheat and dairy-free existence, one sneaky latte and bloating, discomfort, and embarrassing digestive complaints return. Now the makers of a probiotic supplement say it not only halts symptoms, but allows IBS patients to eat whatever they like.

Symprove, available over the counter, is the first treatment proven under laboratory conditions to work. It contains four live strains of the 'friendly bacteria' lactobacillus that, its makers claim, can 'reset' the digestive system.

A trial at London's King's College Hospital found that 57 per cent more patients with moderate to severe IBS

achieved remission while taking it.

We asked one sufferer to put the treatment to the test for a month, while keeping a diary, and the results were remarkable.

Paula Wheeler, 42, is a public health specialist for the NHS who runs marathons in her spare time. She lives in Manchester with partner Tom, 41, and sons Sam, 24, and Tom, 16.

She has had IBS since her university days and her symptoms include nausea, bloating, constipation and diarrhoea. She has been managing her condition through diet – avoiding bread, pasta and acidic fruit – and has taken probiotics in the past, but they did nothing for her.

WEEK ONE

The month's supply of four 500ml Symprove bottles has arrived and I'm to drink 60ml every morning before eating anything. I take it before my shower, so I don't forget.

It tastes like mango cordial. Although I can't drink fruit juices, this is delicious. I had been worried it would be

too sweet, as I can't tolerate anything too high in sugar or E-numbers.

I've decided it's important to continue to eat and exercise as I normally would – that means not testing any of the 'trigger' foods I've been avoiding for several years – so I can be sure any change is down to the Symprove.

By avoiding bread, pasta and acidic food, I had been managing my IBS quite effectively and I don't appear to have any other triggers. But four years ago I started getting into running seriously. I've always been sporty but I found the amount of exercise I was doing was messing with my diet and metabolism.

You need to eat for energy but it takes two hours to digest food, so you have to think a lot more about what and when you eat. As well as timing, I have to plan my running routes for 'pit-stops' – somewhere such as a McDonald's or somewhere else with a loo.

It's an inconvenience I've been working around but it's great to think I might finally have found something



that can alleviate my symptoms.

WEEK TWO

Exercise is becoming much easier, with none of the usual cramping or funny stomach noises while running. I've been trying hard not to change anything else about my diet.

I get the usual bloated feeling only once – at a lunch meeting where just sandwiches were available, bread being one of my trigger foods. I usually bring my own lunch, otherwise you have to eat something.

On Friday we have fish and chips for tea, which normally brings on some of the effects of IBS – bloating or nausea – afterwards, but there has been none of that.

I'm starting to feel quite positive about this.

But the litmus test will be next week when I'm on holiday in Norway.

We're staying with a family, so we'll have to eat what they're eating. It will be interesting to see how things go when I'm out of my comfort zone.

WEEK THREE

Stress and anxiety can trigger my symptoms but, despite all the inevitable worries about getting to the airport, there is no upset.

Staying at someone else's house is usually a bit of a nightmare as I can't really control what I'm eating. Part of that may be psychological, worrying about having to eat different food.

I'm still used to cutting out bread and pasta but I did have some carbs to sustain myself – in fact over the week I had a burger and chips, hot dogs, a moose-meat salad, fish stew . . . I was even able to enjoy a few glasses of wine and local beer. I felt no different afterwards, which is amazing.

WEEK FOUR

Physically I've been feeling a lot better over the past three weeks – my energy levels are fine so I'm back to my usual sporty regime. Because running had appeared to exacerbate the IBS, I had been really conscious of what I was eating, perhaps eating less than I should. I'm able to eat more now, and that feeling of lethargy has gone.

Also, because I was eating less, after a long run in the evening I'd be ravenous and have to eat something in the night, usually brown rice.

That would mean going to bed on a full stomach, then waking up feeling bloated and not wanting breakfast.

I've been testing myself properly

with some longer runs of up to two hours and have been getting no reaction at all.

It's made me realise the extent to which my IBS was dictating where I could go.

I can now head for greener, more open spaces. There is no more grumbling stomach, no need to think about emergency stops.

THE AFTERMATH . . .

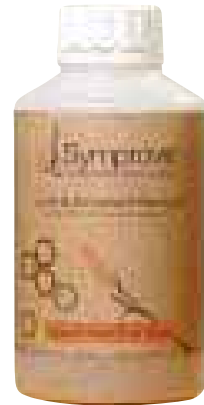
Symprove is now a part of my daily regime – I still drink the probiotic every morning and will definitely keep on using it. It's been a universally positive experience, with no side effects at all.

None of the medication I've taken in the past, such as Colofac, an anti-spasmodic, has had anything like this kind of impact on my IBS, which has been a constant part of my life for almost 20 years. It has affected the rhythm of my life and forced me to do things differently.

I think that doing so much exercise has compounded the effects of my IBS, so for it to work despite my life-style is incredible.

I'll always be careful about what I eat, but I don't have to be so regimented or plan ahead any more.

● *Symprove can be bought online from symprove.com, by phone (01252 413600) and from selected healthcare retailers. A 500ml bottle costs £19.95, with discounts for multiple orders. Dosage is calculated according to body weight, 1ml per kilogram. It is recommended that Symprove be taken for at least 12 weeks to fully reset a person's system and balance the gut.*



RELIEF: Paula Wheeler has suffered for more than 20 years but is now leading a normal life after taking Symprove, above

DOCTOR DOCTOR
Q My baby has a wound on her nose. Is it safe to use a scar-reducing cream?
A These creams have not been tested on this age group. Keep the skin moisturised but otherwise leave it alone.

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