

The tummy trials

Hard to diagnose and difficult to cure, one in three women are living with irritable bowel syndrome. We sent two sufferers to try out different new treatments

Illustrations Karin Akesson

IBS: THE FACTS

What is IBS? The most prevalent functional bowel disorder seen by GPs in Britain, with recent research suggesting that up to one in three of us endure a form of it. But the term IBS can cover many different bowel disorders causing abdominal pain and changes in bowel habits.

Symptoms? Tummy pain, bloating, constipation and/or diarrhoea. Symptoms might also include muscle or joint pain, headaches, tiredness and nausea, usually experienced after eating.

Who gets it? It affects men and women of all ages but it's twice as common in women as in men.

What's the cause? The exact cause is unknown, and many sufferers claim their doctors have called them neurotic. However, IBS is thought to be triggered by food sensitivity, an imbalance of natural bacteria in the gut, an infection 'hangover' after a bout of diarrhoea and emotional trauma and stress – in fact, most experts agree that stress plays a major role.

The holistic approach



Harriet Cooper, 30, *Red's* features editor
SYMPTOMS Cramps, bloating and flatulence, diarrhoea and constipation – especially after eating 'trigger foods' such as sweetcorn or raw onion, or during really stressful times.

TYPICAL DIET I have one coffee a day, and lots of 'builder's tea', water and Diet Coke. Lunch is usually salad with chicken or feta and dinner a stir-fry or pitta and houmous. I'm partial to the odd cigarette and glass of white wine.

LOOKING FOR A holistic, drug-free treatment to help prevent the onset of my IBS, not just treat the symptoms. My GP has prescribed Mebeverine to help ease spasms in the gut, but I hate taking medication.

TREATMENT TRIED THE PALLARDY METHOD

Two years ago, I would have happily tucked into a Greek salad or a baked potato with tuna and sweetcorn. These days I give them a wide berth, because they contain my trigger foods for IBS. My IBS can be debilitating – sometimes it gets so bad I have to cancel my evening plans. Sitting in the pub trying not to pass wind isn't my idea of a fun night out.

So I was intrigued to hear about French osteopath, dietician, and physical therapist, Pierre Pallardy, whose patients have included Frank Sinatra and Audrey Hepburn. He believes the stomach is our second brain and claims that IBS can be eliminated by self-massage of the stomach, breathing techniques, a healthy diet and gentle exercise.

I visited Pallardy at his practice on the Ile de Ré, in France. Having gently probed my

The hi-tech approach



Judith Secombe, 42, *Red's* publisher
SYMPTOMS Bloating, abdominal pain and a low-level headache – like I'd had a few drinks – after eating trigger foods. I also feel tired after eating.

TYPICAL DIET I've been caffeine-free for nine months, have yoghurt with fruit and seeds for breakfast, a salad or sandwich at lunch and meat/fish with salad or veggies for dinner, with fruit for snacks. But when I go on work lunches, it's difficult to know what's in each dish.

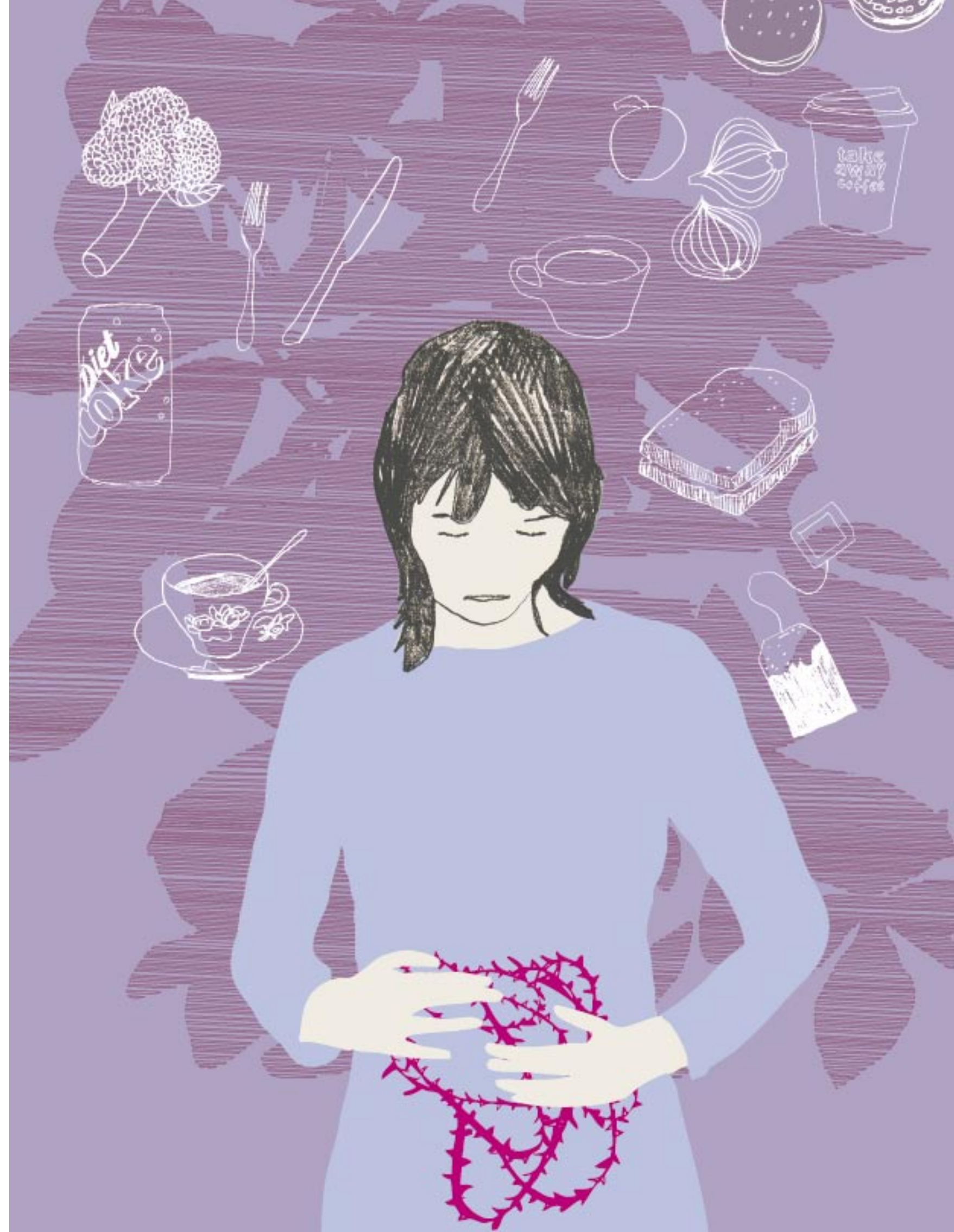
LOOKING FOR A treatment that's credible and straightforward. I have two small children and work long hours in a highly stressful job, so I don't want anything too high-maintenance or 'fluffy'.

TREATMENT TRIED NOVO BLOOD TEST BY IMMOGENICS

I've suffered for years with a sensitive stomach. Ten years ago, I was diagnosed with candida and stuck to an exclusion diet for two years. I lost two and a half stone in the first three months and it alleviated some of the symptoms. But I was still tired, irritable and bloated. In recent years I'd convinced myself that wheat and dairy were a bad idea, but my system still reacted quickly and often violently to other things I was eating.

The Immogenics approach was confusing at first. A blood test checks your blood against a long list of foods that provoke any type of response from your white blood cells.

I was issued with a list of 'green' foods that it was okay to eat and 'red' foods that I shouldn't, listed in order of the strength of the response. (Immogenics also checks



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tummy, he pronounced it tight and cramped, which meant I was both tired and tense.

Pierre also ordered me to slow down and learn to relax. My exercise routine (spinning classes, mostly) wasn't ideal. Pierre believes very physical sports can aggravate the digestive process. Instead I was to swim and walk.

I was to eat three healthy meals a day, slowly. I should avoid fried and spicy dishes, white bread, pastries, biscuits, chocolate, jam and honey – which could aggravate my stomach.

Herbal infusions and mineral water were to be my tipples.

I anxiously asked about white wine, which I love. It was a relief to hear that wine can be drunk in moderation.

Pierre then taught me how to massage my stomach. There are pressure points in the tummy, he said, which correspond to a different organ, system or gland within the body. If the self-massage is painful, there's a dysfunction in one of the organs. When Pierre massaged my tummy, it was excruciating. But if I persevered, concentrating on the small intestine point (situated below the navel) and the colon, for five minutes twice daily, the pain should disappear after a few weeks. While doing this, I was to inhale and exhale slowly and deeply into the stomach, which would help my digestion, relax the brain and calm the abdomen. 'If someone follows my treatment, they might lose 10 to 15 years mentally and physically,' Pierre claimed.

DID IT WORK? Although I missed my morning caffeine fix, the herbal teas grew on me. Breakfast filled me up; I no longer wolfed my lunch; and at dinner-times I sat at a table, rather than perched on a sofa. I immediately began to appreciate what I was eating and to chew more slowly.

The self-massage, deep breathing and swimming were easy to fit into my routine. I felt slimmer, less bloated and was sleeping better. My energy soared, and the IBS symptoms have lessened with my new pace of life. As my stomach improves, so does my confidence. There are still trigger foods I avoid, but I feel more in control of the situation. I'm not even craving coffee any more!

Gut Instinct by Pierre Pallardy (Rodale, £12.99). For a consultation with Pierre, call (00 33) 546 092 129

'I had to slow down and learn how to relax'

The hi-tech approach

for candida and I was pleased I tested negatively.) There were a few surprises on my 'red' list: apples (which I love), almonds, dates, broccoli and avocados – all foods I had never associated with feeling unwell. But it turned out that the main tummy culprit was yeast.

Restricting myself to the 'green' foods, which includes virtually nothing processed, was a challenge. So was the 'avoid alcohol for five weeks' instruction. Ideally, you are supposed to stay off the booze for 10 weeks which gives your system time to adjust and allows the stomach wall to heal.

The diet was tough when I was out of the house. Most prepared salads and dressings contain an amazing array of ingredients, and lemon juice and mustard – both on my 'red' list – seem to be everywhere. Restaurants were also hard because yeast is often hidden in things like stock. I discussed these problems with the Immogenics nutritionist, who called me weekly. With her help, I was able to work the diet into my daily life.

On a couple of occasions, I 'tested' the system by eating something I wasn't supposed to. The reaction was fast: bloating, wind and discomfort. But I am allowed to reintroduce some foods after five weeks, so I'll have to see if a spell avoiding them is enough to solve the problem. Immogenics say avoiding your trigger foods for a set time (ideally three months) can help 'desensitise' your system to them and therefore alleviate your body's reaction. And, as long as you don't start eating too much of them, the sensitivity shouldn't return.

DID IT WORK? My bloating disappeared almost immediately and within a fortnight I'd lost weight. My mood and concentration improved and stayed level, and work colleagues

noticed a rise in my energy levels; I felt like I'd been plugged into the mains! Needless to say, although I don't fully understand the science behind Immogenics, I think there's definitely something in it. 📌

Novo by Immogenics costs £299, including a blood test and guidance, available from immogenics.com

'Colleagues noticed a rise in my energy levels'



Seven simple steps to tackling IBS

- 1 See your GP to be sure it's not something else.
- 2 Treat the pain – if it's severe, take a treatment to target the abdominal spasms such as Buscopan IBS Relief, £4.39.
- 3 Exercise regularly – walking for at least 20 minutes a day helps relieve stress and stimulates peristalsis, the contractions of the intestines essential to digestion.
- 4 Identify trigger foods – keep a food diary. Don't assume your problem is due to wheat or dairy.
- 5 Talk things through and relax – don't let your stress build up or you risk exacerbating symptoms.
- 6 De-stress – exercise is brilliant, but balance it out with regular relaxation. Try spending a day doing absolutely nothing.
- 7 Get help – as well as your GP, complementary help can make a difference. Turn the page for a guide to what's available.

NATIONAL GUT WEEK is from August 21st to 27th. Call (020) 8743 4287; gutweek.org.uk. Visit ibs-relief.co.uk, corecharity.org.uk, ibsnetwork.org.uk or ibs-research-update.org.uk for more information