

## It works for me: aloe vera

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### A plant with healing properties gave one IBS sufferer a new lease of life

Most of us take the simple pleasures in life for granted: holidays, a meal with friends, a glass of wine. But for Christine Shuttle, 46, even the morning commute to work would require hours of preparation and anxiety. "I'd set my alarm for three hours before I needed to leave the house," she says. "I never knew whether I'd wake up with constipation or diarrhoea. I was always worried that bowel spasms might occur during the journey to work, which would be horrendous because there were no toilets on the train."

Shuttle suffered from chronic irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) for more than ten years, a condition that she believes was brought on by the stress of her career in banking management. It was most severe during the week, although even at weekends the symptoms were so debilitating that her social life became non-existent.

"I'd avoid going out for meals because rich, spicy food and alcohol would make the condition flare up," she says. More than one in three British people suffers from IBS at some point in their lives, according to the charity IBS Network. As well as constipation and diarrhoea, there is a crippling list of secondary symptoms that include bloating, abdominal pain, spasms, sluggishness and headaches. Shuttle was referred to the hospital for tests after five years of visiting her GP, but by then the IBS had brought on an irritable bladder syndrome that left her "permanently leaking".

"The muscle relaxant tablets they prescribed to stop bowel spasms would cause problems for the bladder and vice versa," she says. "The whole thing was just so embarrassing. People don't realise how much it can affect your life." She resigned herself to living with both disorders, sticking to a bland diet and taking peppermint capsules and a fibre supplement to help the spasms.

It was four years ago that she first came across Forever Living products, when her GP prescribed Aloe Vera Gel drinking juice for an unconnected skin condition: "I'd been taking steroids for my skin for 20 years, so the doctor asked me if I'd ever thought about a natural alternative," Shuttle says. "When she mentioned aloe vera, I thought she'd gone mad. I thought it was just for soaps."

Aloe Vera Gel drinking juice is an extract of gel from inside the plant's thick, fleshy leaves which allegedly has powerful anti-inflammatory and healing properties. Shuttle's doctor thought that it might help to manage her IBS and to alleviate her skin disorder. "She told me that it can help with anything that ends in '-itus'," Shuttle says.

After three weeks of drinking 4fl oz (114ml) daily, she noticed that her skin had improved and, after six weeks, that the IBS pain, discomfort and spasms had eased dramatically. "I thought that it might be something else, so I stopped drinking the juice for a couple of days and the symptoms came back immediately," she says. "I could put it down only to the Aloe Vera Gel, although I have no idea how it works."

"Since then, she has stuck to a regular regime, drinking double doses of the grapefruit-like drink before a meal, but otherwise leading "a totally normal life". Curry and wine are now back on the menu, and spur-of-the-moment social engagements.

Shuttle has been so amazed at the results that she has become something of an ambassador for Aloe Vera Gel and is keen to spread the word to those who feel embarrassed talking about their IBS. "Once I started telling people I had found something that helped, I was amazed how many friends had the same thing," she says. "I'm sure that if more sufferers knew about aloe vera and its benefits, it would make a significant difference to their quality of life."

She believes that the best thing about her new natural remedy is that there are no side effects. "To anyone with the same condition, I say try it because you can't lose," she says. "It has, literally, changed my life."