

SELF / alternatively speaking

**F**IFTY-THREE-year-old Jo Lyle, a property developer from Darlington in County Durham, started to suffer problems with heartburn and digestive discomfort a year ago.

She experienced considerable bloating and abdominal pains during the day, and could even be woken at night with symptoms of indigestion.

There did not seem to be a clear underlying cause for her condition, which was eventually put down to the demands of a busy working life and erratic eating habits.

Jo found some relief for her condition in conventional medication, but she felt this merely suppressed her symptoms. Then, six months ago, Jo read about the value of the cactus extract aloe vera in the treatment of digestive complaints.

Since then, Jo has found taking aloe vera has led to a lasting reduction in her indigestion symptoms and relieved her bloating and discomfort, too.

Indigestion is a medical term used to cover a variety of symptoms related to eating including heartburn (a burning sensation felt behind the breastbone), abdominal discomfort, nausea, bloating, belching and wind.

Sometimes, indigestion may be related to a specific underlying condition, such as an ulcer in the stomach or duodenum (the first part of the small bowel), or an infection with the organism helicobacter pylori.

# Aloe vera eased my stomach ailments



No more digestive discomfort: Jo Lyle found relief with aloe vera



by Dr JOHN BRIFFA

**V**ERY often, however, no discernible cause can be found for an individual's symptoms, and medication to reduce the amount of acid in the stomach is usually prescribed.

Jo did not find that medication was beneficial in controlling her symptoms. 'Antacids gave me a little relief from the indigestion, but I could still wake up at night and the bloating was still bad,' she says. 'I knew I needed to find something else to calm down my digestive system.'

Extracts of the cactus plant aloe vera have been known to help with a range of digestive complaints. Aloe vera contains a variety of substances which have significant anti-inflammatory effects in the digestive tract.

These and other health-giving substances give aloe the potential to control conditions such as indigestion, heartburn, constipation and irritable bowel syndrome.

The most effective extracts seem to be those that combine the gel from the inside of the leaf with substances derived from outer leaf material.

Jo found great relief from her digestive symptoms by taking aloe

'Within a week of starting a twice-daily dose, my indigestion and heartburn were much better and my bloating more controlled. 'Gradually, as things have improved, I have been able to keep my symptoms at bay with a dose every couple of days. Life really is far more enjoyable now my digestive symptoms are under control.'

**Q** OVER the years I have noticed that my sense of smell has diminished. Is there anything I can do to help restore it? I am 67.  
*Mr B. Chadwick, Warrington.*

**A** A GRADUAL reduction in the sense of smell is a common problem, especially as we age. Because the sense of taste is intimately bound to our ability to smell, this problem may exhibit itself as a desire to eat increasingly strongly flavoured or spicy foods.

Loss of smell (also referred to as anosmia by the medical profession) can sometimes be related to smoking or conditions such as nasal inflammation (rhinitis) or head injury.

Usually, though, there is no discernible underlying cause, and treatment options tend to be limited.

Natural agents may sometimes help improve sense of smell. Zinc is often used for this purpose. Take 30-45mg each day.

As zinc supplementation may cause copper deficiency in time, I recommend that you take 2-3mg of copper with this.

Another nutrient which may help is magnesium. Take 250mg per day.

**Q** I SUFFER from low mood and depression, which seems to be worse in the winter. Could I be suffering from seasonal affective disorder?

*Emma McLaren, Salisbury, Wilt.*

**A** SEASONAL affective disorder (SAD) is a condition which is characterised by depression related to reduced exposure to sunlight.

Generally, the depression will start in the autumn or winter, and disappear in the spring. The condi-

tion is common, with estimates of one in 20 people being affected to some degree.

The conventional treatment is anti-depressant drugs. However, natural approaches are often an effective alternative, and are less likely to give rise to unwanted side-effects.

It makes sense for you to get as much natural daylight as possible. Even on a dull day, the amount of natural light you may be exposed to is far higher than you will find in most indoor settings.

Brisk walking, jogging and cycling are exercises that will help lift your mood. It is also worthwhile considering buying a 'light box' for use at home or work.

These devices, which give off light with the specific characteristics of the sun's rays, can often help to combat the symptoms of SAD. Depression may be affected by

certain dietary factors. For instance, caffeine, alcohol and sugar are commonly associated with depression, and eliminating them from the diet can help improve mood.

Eat plenty of oily fish such as salmon, trout, tuna, herring and mackerel, because the consumption of the healthy fats present in these fish seems to help protect against depression.

Many SAD sufferers find that taking a preparation based on the herb hypericum (St John's wort) helps relieve symptoms. The usual dose is 300mg of standardised extract three times a day.

**■ FOR more information on light boxes and other treatment options for SAD, send an SAE to SAD Association, PO Box 989, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3HG.**