

GOOD HEALTH

The cactus drink that may help cure millions

Why irritable bowel sufferers swear by their daily dose of aloe vera juice

A CACTUS-LIKE plant could be the key to relieving irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), an often debilitating condition which affects an estimated 12 million people in the UK.

Also known as spastic colon, IBS is the most common disorder of the bowel, accounting for more than half the patients referred to a gastroenterologist. Symptoms can range from extreme abdominal pain, excessive wind, alternating diarrhoea and constipation to indigestion, exhaustion and lower back pain. Although symptoms can disappear for long periods of time, IBS is usually recurrent throughout life.

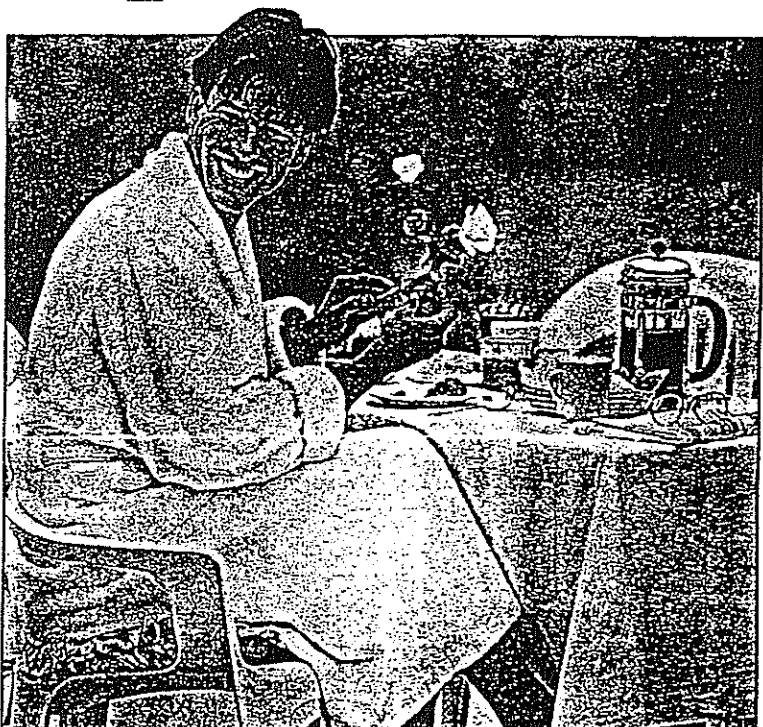
The cause is not fully understood but it is thought to be a disturbance of the normal muscle function of the large intestine. Most people develop the condition before the age of 35 and women sufferers outnumber men by about three to one.

Orthodox treatment for IBS is either anti-spasmodic drugs to control the muscles of the intestine, or bulking agents such as Fybogel, which help material pass through the intestine. These can suppress symptoms but are not a long-term cure.

However sufferers are now claiming that by taking a daily dose of the bitter-tasting extract of the aloe vera plant, they have cured their problem permanently.

Although aloe juice is readily available in health food shops and even Harrod's converts claim it is medicine's best-kept secret.

Dr Peter Atherton, an NHS doctor practising in Buckingham, who has until now been a staunch supporter of orthodox medicine, says: "Last year a patient asked me if I had heard of aloe vera as a healing agent. I ordered all current research on it and I was astonished to find 39 out of the 49 research papers were positive. I immediately initiated trials on some of my long-term chronically ill patients, suffering not only IBS but also psoriasis, eczema and arthritis, who



by Hazel Courtney

had received no benefit from orthodox treatments." Dr Atherton believes aloe vera helps recovery because of its wide range of ingredients. "The aloe juice is rich in vitamins." It has nine out of the ten most important amino acids, the essential building blocks of protein, a wide range of trace element minerals such as calcium, chromium, copper, magnesium, manganese, zinc and potassium. It also contains natural agents

like saponins which have antiseptic properties and anthraquinones which have antibiotic, antiviral and anti-inflammatory effects.

A study led by Jeffrey Bland, carried out at The Linus Pauling Institute of Science & Medicine, California, concluded that aloe vera juice has the natural facility to break down and loosen impacted material in the bowel. It also helps in detoxifying the colon, and has no harmful or irritant effects on the bowel.

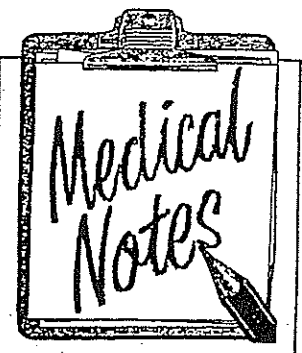
Paul Hornsey-Pennell, 33, from Hampshire, was diagnosed as suffering from IBS 12 years ago. He says: "The doctors didn't seem to know much about the condition. I

was told simply to eat less fibre. For more than ten years I put up with debilitating pain to the point of almost being hospitalised."

Last year Paul's wife Fiona recommended aloe vera, having heard from friends that it could help. Paul recalls: "I was having a painful attack. After a few minutes I felt this warming sensation as the aloe went down. It seemed to soothe the tension and the spasm disappeared."

Paul took a tablespoonful of aloe every day for four months. As his symptoms didn't recur, he cut the dose down to a tablespoonful every other day. "The relief is marvellous," he says. "For the first time in ten years I can eat what I like."

He is so impressed with aloe that he has written a book to explain its benefits.



▼ **NATURAL** family planning is made easy with a new Fertility Awareness Kit that goes on sale today. The kit helps women pinpoint the fertile phase of their monthly cycle with expert advice on a video, presented by BBC personality Sue Cook and teacher Hilda Heald. A thermometer and charts are part of the package which will be available, price £19.99, from the Family Planning Association, some pharmacists and by mail order on 0965 749333 or 715666 (outside office hours).

▼ **POSITIVE** relaxation techniques developed by therapist and multiple sclerosis sufferer Steve Brisk are being made available on two new audio cassettes. Although initially conceived to help those with physical disabilities such as MS, the deep relaxation exercises are also suitable for the able-bodied. Gentle On Your Mind is available from Relaxa Tapes, 33 Beverley Gardens, Cheltenham, Glos GL52 4DD, at £4.50 each inc p&p, with 70 per cent of the price going to the MS Society.

▼ **SCIENTISTS** have discovered that musical people are born, not made. German researchers reporting in Science Journal used magnetic resonance imaging to compare the brains of professional musicians with non-musicians. They discovered that a specific part of the left side of the brain was larger in those who were musically gifted and it almost always correlated with perfect pitch.

▼ **THE** pioneering Disfigurement Rehabilitation Unit in Bristol, set up to help people with burns and other disfigurements cope with the trauma of being seen in public, urgently needs £170,000 to become fully operational. Changing Faces, the charity which initiated the project, can be contacted on 0171-251 4232.

▼ **PEOPLE** with eczema can now buy products like Ho45 containing one per cent hydrocortisone over the counter to treat the skin condition. The change takes effect this month for sufferers from mild to moderate eczema. Previously such products could be sold only to treat contact dermatitis and reactions to insect bites. However, the product is still restricted for use in children. The under-16s must be treated under medical supervision only, because a child's skin is thinner and will absorb more of the medication.

DIETERS TAKE PASTA OFF THE MENU

PASTA, until now the dieter's staple, has once more been declared an enemy by American nutritionists. The low-fat, high carbohydrate favoured for weight-loss has come under scrutiny by Stanford University in California. The theory is that carbohydrates in foods such as pasta, potatoes and bread can cause

certain people to produce more of the hormone insulin. This stimulates the liver to convert excess glucose into fat but in people who are 'insulin resistant' — thought to be about a quarter of the population — simple carbohydrates trigger an over-production of glucose which, in turn, triggers over-production of insulin, making it more

likely that calories will be converted to fat. The report, which has caused a scandal in Italy, claims that this explains why the average American is eight pounds heavier than a decade ago, despite cutting fat intake from 36 per cent of daily calories to 32 per cent. However Ursula Arens, of the British Nutrition Foundation, is sceptical.

She believes that the main problem with pasta is that American portions are larger — the average pasta serving in American restaurants is nine ounces. "If the average American has really cut down fat intake but is still not losing weight, it suggests that they are becoming more sedentary faster than they are cutting calories," she says.