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Energy calculator approved by energywatch

*Energy savings based on a customer changing from their local electricity provider for electricity and British Gas for gas and changing their payment method to direct debit. Illustration based on 3,300kwh of electricity and 20,500kwh of gas per annum. Homephone savings based on a customer changing from BT Option 1 to the cheapest alternative supplier. Phone usage based on a total of 1,210 minutes of calls per month to landlines and mobiles at all times of the day. All prices correct on March 31, 2005.

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www.mirror.co.uk/money/utilities

I could never stray far from a toilet

LORRAINE Marlow, 38, an office manager from Winchester, suffered from IBS for seven years. She says...

"IT started when I picked up a nasty bout of food poisoning. After that, I started to get awful bloating - I'd look five months pregnant and I'd get terrible wind.

"I'd also get diarrhoea and stomach pains with sudden urges to go to the loo. Sometimes I was too scared to go out in case I was caught short. My social life became virtually non-existent - even going to the gym was a problem.

"My doctor gave me tablets that relax the stomach muscles. But they only helped a bit. Then I read up about irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and gave up wheat and gluten, which I heard can aggravate the condition. Things improved slightly but I was still far from healthy.

"Then my cousin suggested aloe vera juice. Now I don't get diarrhoea all the time and my stomach isn't bloated. I'm almost back to normal."

● LORRAINE takes Aloe Vera Gel from Forever Living Products (01926 626630/www.foreverliving.com)



READER'S DIGEST: Lorraine discovered aloe vera helped her

QUICK FACTS: IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

THE symptoms of IBS include diarrhoea, constipation, abdominal pain, bloating and wind. Many sufferers also claim they lack energy and have problems sleeping. It's hard to pinpoint exactly what causes IBS. Some people notice they develop problems after a bout of food poisoning or gastroenteritis. Stress and diet can also make IBS symptoms worse. Up to a third of people experience IBS symptoms from time to time, with slightly more women affected than men.

● HOW DO YOU TREAT IT? KEEP a record of any foods you suspect may trigger problems - wheat, dairy, onions, nuts and caffeine are common culprits - then cut them out. Find a relaxation method to beat stress and try herbal remedies, such as aloe vera juice and peppermint oil capsules.

● MORE HELP? THE Digestive Disorders Foundation on 020 7486 0341/ www.digestivedisorders.org.uk

Pictures: DANIEL LEWIS / CHRIS GRIEVE / GEOFF ROBINSON

