

WELLBEING

BELLY UP

IBS affects one-fifth of the UK population. Conventional medication offers mixed results, but a new diet could bring welcome relief

Six years ago, when talkshow host Tyra Banks said in a *Vanity Fair* interview that she was “very gassy”, she was not referring to her ability to chat with her guests. As with an estimated 20 per cent of the UK population and fellow celebrities Kirsten Dunst and Jenny McCarthy, the former model suffers from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), one of the most common digestive disorders.

While the exact cause of this chronic – often lifelong – condition remains unknown, it is believed to be linked to an increased sensitivity of the gut, generally brought on during periods of stress and prompted by eating certain foods. Symptoms commonly appear when sufferers are aged between 20 and 30 and include:

- Abdominal pain and cramping;
- Sudden changes in bowel habits including diarrhoea or constipation, or in some cases alternating between the two
- Bloating;
- Flatulence;
- Feeling an urgent need to empty your bowels;
- Feeling that your bowels haven't been completely emptied.

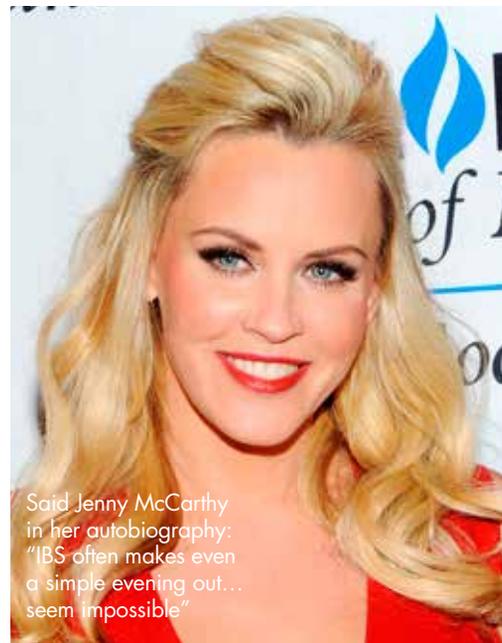
But despite the prevalence of the condition and the effect it has on the lives of sufferers, many never visit their GP, often simply putting up with their symptoms or opting for alternative therapies instead of conventional treatment. 



Tyra Banks announced on her own talkshow that she suffers from IBS



Actress Kirsten Dunst has said in several interviews that she suffers from IBS



Said Jenny McCarthy in her autobiography: "IBS often makes even a simple evening out... seem impossible"

"IBS is a cause of significant ill health and quality-of-life impairment among people, usually at an age when you can least afford to be ill," says Doctor Jeremy Sanderson, consultant gastroenterologist at London Bridge Hospital.

"It is often poorly understood by doctors and [it's] not surprising that so many sufferers seek advice from alternative or complementary practitioners."

Medication to treat IBS is available, but research shows that less than a quarter of patients using them report full relief from their symptoms. Instead, most have found that the best way to manage and relieve their IBS is by making changes to their diet, including eating more fibre and drinking more water.

"Dietary approaches to treatment fit more logically with newer theories on the cause of IBS," adds Dr Sanderson.

The latest development is the low-FODMAP diet, created by researchers at Monash University in Melbourne. Described by Dr Sanderson as "a real advance in this area", it's claimed the diet has provided relief to thousands.

FODMAP stands for fermentable oligo-saccharides, di-saccharides, mono-saccharides and polyols. Found in foods such as wheat, onion, garlic, some vegetables, pulses, apples, mango, milk and yoghurts, honey, certain types of sweetener and sugar-free chewing gum,

these short-chain carbohydrates are poorly absorbed by the small intestine. As a result, they pass to the large intestine and are fermented by naturally occurring gut bacteria and pull fluid into the bowel, creating loose stools.

Patients following a low-FODMAP diet need to avoid a number of foods such as wheat-based bakery products, certain fruits and vegetables, as well as many tinned or packaged soups and sauces.

When overseen by a dietician, it has been effective in reducing or eliminating the cramping and bloating associated with IBS.

What's more, they may not have to cut out all of these foods forever. The second phase of the diet, the "reintroduction phase", enables patients to identify the foodstuffs they are most sensitive to and work out what quantities of these they can comfortably tolerate.

"The low-FODMAP diet provides sufferers who may have reached the end of their patience in the treatment of IBS with the chance to reduce, and in many cases eliminate, the symptoms of a condition that otherwise impacts them on a daily basis," says Evelyn Toner, specialist dietician at London Bridge Hospital.

"It is a real innovation for those with symptomatic IBS. By removing fermentable carbohydrates from the diet, we remove the substrate for bacteria to act on and reduce

the pull of fluid into the small bowel, thus eliminating the resultant symptoms such as bloating and flatulence."

RELIEF EFFORT

A low-FODMAP diet should only be undertaken under the guidance of a dietician. Here's what a typical day's eating plan might consist of:

Breakfast

2 eggs on wheat/rye-free toast or a suitable cereal with lactose-free milk.

Lunch

Baked potato or rice with tuna or cheese and a salad of low-FODMAP vegetables
Low-FODMAP fruit with soya/lacto-free natural yoghurt.

Dinner

Chicken risotto (no onion/garlic) with a side of suitable low-FODMAP vegetables
Rice pudding with blueberries.

Snacks

Suitable low-FODMAP fruit
Cheese/tomato on rice crackers/corn cakes
Occasional potato crisps (suitable varieties would be provided by your dietician), chocolate, wheat-free biscuits/cakes. ■

SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS...

FOR SHORT-TERM RELIEF OF YOUR IBS SYMPTOMS, THESE EASILY AVAILABLE REMEDIES ARE WORTH CONSIDERING



▶ **Peppermint oil** Proven to soothe the intestines and calm spasms. Choose a time-release capsule and take three times a day. Try: Colpermin IBS Relief Capsules (left), £5.49 or Biocare Peppermint Complex, £14.70.



▶ **Antispasmodics** You can now get these at chemists. They work to quickly and effectively calm the muscle spasms in the intestines, easing pain in around 15 minutes. Try Buscopan IBS relief, £3.19, and Colofac, £5.49.



▶ **Probiotics** Can help balance gut bacteria and limit growth of certain bacteria in the small intestine. Try Symprove Original (left), £21.95, from victoriahealth.com; Optibac for Bowel Calm, £8.99, after periods of diarrhoea; and Optibac for a Flat Stomach, £8.99, if you suffer bloating.