

After decade of daily pain, herbal remedy has saved me

Herbalism isn't everyone's cup of tea. Some think it's wacky and 'out there' but others believe it can cure life-long illnesses. One such believer is ANNABEL CROW...

WHEN you're constantly in pain you want to know why. So when you finally get diagnosed it must come as a relief ? Well not if it's the wrong diagnosis. Annabel Crow, 26, knows about being wrongly diagnosed. The assistant underwriter has just returned from a fabulous three-week honeymoon in Thailand. It was a happy occasions for more than one reason. Not only had Annabel married the love of her life, she was - for the first time - free from the agonising stomach pains that had blighted her life for for the past decade. Annabel's stomach problems began when she was 15 and, despite the many tests that she underwent, including a colonoscopy and calprotectin, which were all negative, she was eventually told she probably had irritable bowel disease (IBS). "At 16 I felt written off," said Annabel, from Southend. "There was no treatment and no cure. I had IBS and just had to 'get on with it'. But how do you 'get on with it' when the pain's so severe you can't go to school or work, or you're being rushed to the A&E?" "I became intolerant to food and anything I ate, especially dishes cooked with onion and garlic. Going out for a meal became very stressful and after a while I stopped going out altogether." Annabel didn't believe her lifestyle could be blamed on her stomach condition as she had always cooked, non-processed food and worked out regularly to maintain her health and fitness. It became a continuing process of eliminating different food groups to see what, if anything, made a difference. Having that kind of up and down relationship with food is not easy. "It's difficult at any age, let alone when you're a teenager," said Annabel. Annabel thought she would just have to live with her pain but then in January this year Annabel's mother Laura, who was having treatment at Cliffs Chiropractic Clinic in

Westcliff suggested that she should visit Melanie Soomro, who practises there as a qualified medical herbalist. Annabel hoped perhaps there would finally be some light at the end of the tunnel into finding respite from her ongoing agony - especially during her final wedding preparations. If you haven't heard of medical herbalism, you're not alone. The use of herbs and plants to treat the sick is ancient but this branch of medicine only gained official recognition in 1864. It involves a holistic approach to illness, treating

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the individual and its underlying cause, rather than the symptoms and involves using plants that

have the backing of research and clinical trials as well as longstanding traditional use. The UK's first hospital-based NHS herbal clinic was launched in 2007, with renowned TV botanist and conservationist Professor David Bellamy OBE, doing the opening honours. Since then interest in this alternative form of medicine has blossomed and Britons now spend £450 million a year on treatments such as acupuncture, osteopathy, homeopathy and aromatherapy. Annabel was happy to go into her appointment at the Cliffs with an open mind. After intensive questioning by Melanie to delve into Annabel's medical history, Annabel was told she had a 'leaky gut'. The gut, which is sometimes called the 'second brain' is the gateway to health. Melanie, who is also an award-winning chiropractor and co- founded the Cliffs Chiropractic Clinic in 1994, explained: "A healthy gut should have the right proportion of good bacteria which lines and protects the digestive tract from damage and plays an important role in maintaining the immune system. "Lifestyle, stress, infections, allergies, alcohol and a poor diet will all affect the level

of good bacteria, leaving room for harmful bacteria to proliferate. Then there is a decreased ability to absorb the nutrients from food and an increasing number of allergies develop which lead to 'always feeling rubbish', as in Annabel's case." She prescribed Annabel a mixture of herbs and nutrients, all in tablet form, that she would need to take initially to get her gut back on track. At each meeting Melanie would adjust the medication according to how Annabel was responding. Annabel's energy levels were improving day by day and everything was going well until she got a stomach infection which almost took her back to square one. But by March she was feeling much better again and, by the end of May, "feeling rubbish" for five or six days a week had been reduced to only one or two days in two months. Melanie believes the cause of Annabel's discomfort could have been down to many things, including a past severe case of glandular fever, a parasitic infection or the development of multiple food intolerances. It should be stressed that not all orthodox medical practitioners are convinced that leaky gut can be caused by wide ranging medical issues. According to the NHS website while some conditions and medications can cause a leaky gut (what scientists call increased intestinal permeability) it stresses there is currently "little evidence to support the theory that a porous bowel is the direct cause of any significant, widespread problems". It adds how there is also " little evidence" that herbal remedy treatments can be beneficial for the condition. But for Annabel, there is no doubt. She is 100 per cent convinced the treatment she has received has changed her life: "All I can say is that I've had 10 years of stomach pain, but now I feel better, and calmer. "I even enjoy going out for a meal, just as I did on my honeymoon, which may seem quite minor to some, but to me it's a triumph!" For more information on Melanie and her work, visit www.cliffschiropractorsouthend.

