

GOOD HEALTH CASEBOOK

SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR...?

I HAVE a dull yet persistent stomach ache. Sometimes it flares up, becomes swollen and is accompanied by constipation. Could this be something I am eating?

DR ROSEMARY LEONARD, a general practitioner, says:

'The symptoms may simply be due to inadequate fibre in the diet. This can lead to chronic constipation.'

'They could also be symptoms of an irritable bowel (IBS), where there is intermittent swelling and spasm of the bowel muscles.'

'One should eat adequate roughage but not overdo it, as excess fibre can make IBS worse. Take plenty of exercise, drink lots of (non-carbonated) fluids, and try not to get too stressed, as this can also make IBS worse. Peppermint oil capsules and muscle relaxants, such as mebeverine, can all help to ease IBS.'

'If symptoms persist, it is important to be examined by a GP as very occasionally these symptoms can be signs of something more serious, such as bowel cancer.'



OR... THE HOMEOPATH

DR ANDREW LOCKIE, author of *The Family Guide to Homeopathy*, says:

'THESE symptoms could be caused by a food allergy or intolerance. If the stomach ache was accompanied by a tendency to eczema and overweight. Graphites would be a good remedy to consider.'

'If the ache were combined with a great thirst for large amounts of fluid at infrequent intervals, plus an overall irritability, then a possible remedy would be Bryonia.'



THE HERBALIST

ANNE McINTYRE, author of *The Complete Floral Healer*, says:

'IT SOUNDS as if you may be suffering from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and if this is the case you could be reacting to something you are eating. Food intolerance is often at the root of IBS and the patient may well feel better if milk, wheat products, eggs and nuts were temporarily omitted from the diet.'

'In the meantime, the patient could take teas or tinctures of chamomile, lemon balm, fennel or peppermint to help improve digestion. If stress plays a significant part in symptoms, then chamomile and hops are particularly useful.'



THE NUTRITIONIST

NICOLA GRIFFIN practises at the Hale Clinic. She says:

'This sounds like IBS, which would most certainly be caused by diet. Wheat and dairy products are most often the culprits, but it could be anything. I recommend a food intolerance test. For information on tests, tel. 01285 720727.'

'However, it is important to see a doctor to rule out any other stomach disorder.'

'For constipation, a course of probiotics replenishes the friendly bacteria needed by the gut for good digestion. Niagra probiotic is a good one. The patient should also take a digestive enzyme before meals and a multi B complex may help improve muscle tone in the gastro-intestinal tract.'

'Linseeds sprinkled onto food will lubricate the digestive tract, easing constipation.'



SIR JULIAN CRITCHLEY, 68, has led a varied life. After two failed marriages, the former MP for Aldershot now lives with his first love, Prue Bellak, in Ludlow, Shropshire, where they rent a Georgian house. Lucky enough to have survived the debilitating effects of polio as a child, in 1993 the father of four was diagnosed as having prostate cancer. Although Sir Julian won his battle against cancer, he continues to be plagued by the legacy of his childhood disease. He suffers from post-polio syndrome, which prompted his resignation from the House of Commons. Here he recalls how he was first struck down with the illness and how it continues to haunt him...



Sir Julian Critchley: Post-polio syndrome returned to strike him down

LOOKING back, two dates stand out — Saturday, November 5, 1949, and Saturday, May 18, 1991. They are connected by the polio virus. The first date is the occasion of my original attack; the second, my collapse due to a shattered spinal disc at my third daughter's wedding more than 40 years later. It seems that once the virus has got you, it does not easily let go.

That Saturday in 1949 was a typical November morning in London. A smear of yellow fog grasped me by the throat as I set off from our house in Swiss Cottage in North London to walk the mile to the store (now vanished) called John Barnes. After five minutes, I felt so sick I turned round and walked gingerly back home, counting the steps. I collapsed into bed and could hear, somewhere in the distance, the anxious voice of my mother telephoning my father at his Queen Square consulting rooms. (Father was a neurologist.)

The autumn of 1949 saw yet another of those terrible polio epidemics that seemed to strike the young and healthy. Polio, or infantile paralysis, as it was then called, returned each late summer, spreading fear among the young.

Swimming pools were closed, excessive exercise was discouraged (the night before I had played badminton), but all one could do was wait and hope.

Father was full of tales of the iron lung, the metal prison in which those unlucky enough not to die were incarcerated. He must have lost count of how many cases he had seen.

THESE were the days before the invention of the Salk and Salk vaccine. Once the diagnosis was made, it was just a question of waiting for the worst.

I can recall lying in bed on Guy Fawkes Night, listening to the rattle of explosions on Hampstead Heath, dosing myself with Vegamin and trying to sleep. I felt as if I was suffering from a nasty attack of flu.

On the Tuesday I got out of bed, only to find that my right leg would not respond and I could barely totter to the lavatory. My mother told me what my father and she had feared: I had succumbed to polio.

I was whisked into the National Hospital in Queen Square, where I spent six weeks recovering and enduring the only palliative then known — physiotherapy. At least the Rifle Brigade would not conscript me, and I missed the war in Korea.

Over the next 40 years I learnt to disguise my limp. I could not run because I was incapable of standing on tip-toe on my right foot. I went everywhere by bike, and took care when finding myself in the company of friends whose 'radius of action' was greater than my own.

I had a slow cruising speed, but could walk across a moonlit Hampstead from the tennis courts at Haverstock Hill to Swiss Cottage. I went up to Oxford, where sport was barred to me. I had wanted to gain a Boxing Blue.

On the second of my two

Polio had left me with a limp but 40 years on, its terrible legacy has made me a cripple

dates, May 18, 1991 — the day of my daughter Melissa's marriage — the demon returned. I have a home movie of Melissa and me walking into the church. It was the last time I managed to walk unaided.

The wedding was a nightmare and I do not know how I managed to get through it. My speech was short and sweet. Finally, I was helped home to a hot bath. I felt so dreadful that we could not dine with the bridegroom's parents.

NEXT day, I was taken by ambulance to Frimley Park Hospital. No sooner was I given a room than my back exploded in agony, the pains starting in the right buttock and sweeping down the right leg as far as the knee.

Thank God there was a Sister present. 'Are you in agony?' she asked. I said I was, and was promptly injected with morphine. I must have been 'out' for the better part of the day.

The disc that had controlled my weakened leg had burst under the pressure of 40 years. But why the spread of paralysis beyond the place where it had stopped in 1949? Does the polio virus lie dormant, only to strike again?

I had an operation to clean out my disc at the National. I was promised the earth by a

cheerfully optimistic surgeon, but, at the end of the day, was no better than before.

It was time to take stock. I was a Tory MP facing an election. Would my friends permit me to fight it, on crutches and suffering from an alarming lack of stamina. They did. I won — and with more votes than before.

But I became a registered disabled and was in constant pain. Since then I must have sucked more Temgesic (a morphine derivative) than many an addict, without becoming one.

I was in bed each day by 6pm. I could not do my duty as MP for Aldershot, though I could manage to write, and spent my

time writing my autobiography, *A Bag of Boiled Sweets*. I retired from Parliament in 1997.

Today, the pain in the back and leg is better, thanks to a pain doctor, Dr Wedley, and I have regained much of my stamina. But I cannot walk any distance, hobbling around the house on a single crutch.

I know my story is not an uncommon one. Those who developed polio in the years of the great epidemics (1946-1955) are now in their 60s and 70s. Look out for the number of single or double crutches — they are legion.

■ *The British Polio Fellowship*, tel. 0181-842 1898.

■ MORE than 30,000 air travellers in Britain can be affected by life-threatening blood clots every year — leading to ill health, amputation of a leg, and even death. Longhaul travel probably carries the greatest risk, according to the Aviation Health Institute, which is carrying out a major study. It is seeking volunteers aged 50 and over travelling longhaul, whose blood flow will be checked before and after flying using high-tech scanning equipment at Stamford Hospital, West London.

Dr John Scurr, consultant at University College, London, says: 'There is a problem, but up until now airlines have ignored it. I see lots of patients — about three a week — who have suffered clots in their leg and shortness of breath after longhaul flights.' Dr Farrol Kahn, director of the Institute, said the shrinking seat pitch in economy class and poorly designed leg rests in business class are contributory factors. Anyone interested in taking part should phone 0800 389 6066.