

When arthritis strikes out of the blue, with no obvious cause, it can be a challenge to get to the bottom of it, especially when it turns out to be related to a job you had many years ago. **Joyce Walter** talks to a woman facing this problem, and the nutritional therapist who uncovered the mystery.

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**A**s an artist, Meriel Lloyd, 38, relies on the dexterity in her fingers for her livelihood. So when her fingers started to stiffen up and get sore halfway through her working day, it became a huge worry for her.

"The more I did with my hands, the worse the pain got. At the start of the day they would be fine, but after three or four hours of work I couldn't go on. I was also getting pain in my knees and feet, which stopped me from the long walks with my dogs which I love," recalls Meriel, whose GP suggested a *wait and see* approach for a month or two.

This wasn't the first time Meriel had suffered with this sort of pain. Six years ago, the aches and pains became very severe and her GP referred her to a rheumatologist, who gave her the all-clear for rheumatoid arthritis, but told her she was suffering from "polyarthritis", a common rheumatic condition officially known as polymyalgia rheumatica or PMR. In conventional medicine it is often treated with corticosteroids, which reduce the inflammation and pain. Women are affected about twice as often as men.

Says Meriel, "The rheumatologist told me he had no idea what caused it, but it was probably the result of a virus. He put me on a course of steroids, and the pain eventually went. But when it flared up again six years later, I really didn't want to go down the steroid route again and I was hoping to get to the bottom of it this time."

### Was food the cause?

Meriel thought the culprit may have been something she was – or wasn't – eating, and decided to give up wheat and alcohol for a while to see if that helped. It didn't. So she decided to consult nutritional therapist Fleur Brown, who is based in Tunbridge Wells, to see if she could help.

"Fleur took a full case history and noted down what I ate every day. In addition to the pain in my hands and feet, I was also experiencing backache, and had very low energy levels which really dragged me down. She suggested I keep a pain chart, rating my



symptoms on a scale of 0 to 3 each day, to see when things were at their worst and to help us see any patterns.

Fleur suspected that the stiffness in Meriel's hands could be a reaction to either bacteria or parasites in her system, so she ran some diagnostic tests to find out. During Meriel's first bout of arthritis, six years ago, she was working as a veterinary nurse and Fleur thought she might possibly have contracted something from the animals she worked with.

## Tests confirm "positive" for parasites

Her suspicion proved spot-on. Lab tests showed that Meriel was battling a parasite called *Blastocystis hominis*, and that the count of beneficial bacteria in her gut was very low. Fleur started her on a herbal and vitamin detox for a month, which would help to make her body more receptive to the anti-parasite treatment. Meriel was also given a supplement to help her joints, containing fish oil and glucosamine.

"I eat a mainly vegetarian diet, with the inclusion of some fish, says Meriel, and Fleur thought that on the whole I had a pretty healthy diet, but that it was too heavily loaded with carbohydrates which could be affecting my blood sugar level and making me tired. She suggested I eat protein at every meal, and also that I cut down on sugary foods. I didn't think I ate much sugar, but Fleur pointed out that there is loads of sugar in fruit juice which I drank lots of, and in the maple syrup I put on my porridge and the honey in my tea, that sort of thing. She also said I should increase the range of vegetables I ate, so I'd have a larger variety of nutrients in my diet. I tended to eat the same vegetables all the time, namely broccoli and carrots, the usual boring ones! She suggested I get more adventurous, and that I try others like fennel, grated beetroot, and to try to eat fish three times a week, which I was happy to do. I also started to drink a mug of hot water with the juice of half an organic lemon and some crushed ginger every morning, to give my body a bit of a cleanse and to increase circulation. It's a really nice drink to start the day."

## Back to work – and good health

After a month on her new regime, Meriel began to take an anti-parasitic herbal remedy containing berberine and grapefruit seed. "During the first month I noticed some improvement in my hands and in my energy levels – but it was halfway through the second month that I realised I had gone through a whole day with virtually no pain at all," recalls Meriel. The supplements normally take three months to work completely, and by the time she had finished the course, Meriel was pain-free, more energetic, and back to doing a full day's work. She says, "I'm absolutely delighted with the result, and with the effort Fleur made to get to the bottom of this."

### Nutritional therapist Fleur Brown says:

"Polyarthritis is often triggered by a bacterial or parasitic infection, typically in the gut. Also in some cases high homocysteine levels can be a factor. A Comprehensive Stool Analysis test revealed that Meriel had practically no growth of beneficial bacteria in her gut and also a high level of the parasite *Blastocystis hominis*. I didn't want to start an anti-parasitic treatment straight away, as you are likely to get better results if you detox the system first. I used a Chinese herbal product for this called TIAO He Cleanse, which has a good combination of detox ingredients such as psyllium husks, and also black walnut hulls, which is a mild anti-parasitic to start the process off. It's a brilliant bowel cleanser as it really starts to move everything through. The herbal anti-parasite remedy that followed is made by Nutri and is taken for three months so that it doesn't just kill the active parasites but the eggs that then hatch as well. I also suggested a probiotic supplement to boost the good bacteria in Meriel's gut, and an excellent supplement for the joints, called JointGuard – which contains fish oil, ginger oil and glucosamine, to reduce inflammation. It's worth trying these natural anti-inflammatories, instead of going down the road of taking steroids or non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs, because over a long period of time, these can ruin the lining of the gut."



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