

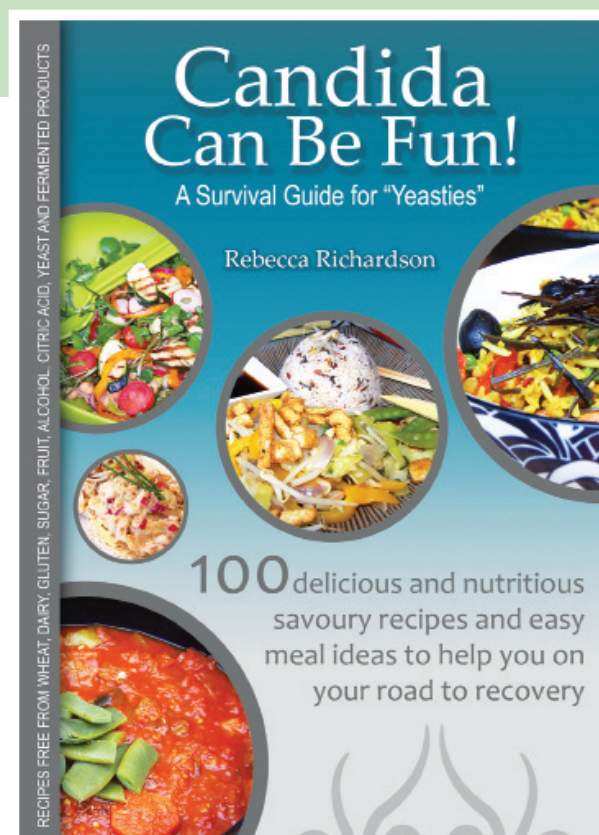
Sharing the wealth and improving our health!

Rebecca Richardson

The one thing that has struck me whilst on my own personal quest for wellbeing is how many of the professionals in the complementary therapy, nutrition and healing fields have chosen their career path through their own health experiences, conventional medicine having failed them in some way.

Like myself, their symptoms were overcome simply by a change in their diet, a gentle exercise routine, relaxation techniques and a positive attitude. Due to their remarkable results, they have decided to make it their life's work to go on to encourage others with their recommendations of what worked for them, in the hope that their clients too can heal themselves. These practitioners have a wealth of knowledge of complementary and holistic therapies which they want to share to help others. Also, more and more companies are now providing us with high quality vitamins, supplements and probiotics to help boost our immune systems. I am grateful for their alternative approach to every day medicine so that people have a choice to try natural health products instead of pharmaceutical drugs/antibiotics.

However, I am not saying that there isn't a time and place for modern medicine; I always recommend people consult their GPs fully and undergo all tests available to rule out every possibility for their symptoms. I wouldn't be without our wonderful, yet under-staffed and over-stretched NHS in the UK. My hope is that, in the future, GPs and consultants will have a more open mind to holistic therapies and dietary changes for certain health issues and will be able to offer integrated therapies to their patients, either on-site or as a referral (e.g. hypnotherapy, homeopathy, counselling, massage and shiatsu). I believe this is already happening with some GPs using acupuncturists and osteopaths within surgery. One exciting piece of news I heard recently from Linda Booth, Vice Chair of UK Colonics, The Association of Registered Colon Hydrotherapists (ARCH), is that she will be opening an IBS (colon hydrotherapy) clinic at a GP's surgery in Nottingham. This will be great news for patients suffering with various bowel conditions. I hope other clinics will see this as a beneficial treatment and set



them up elsewhere.

Every day, I read something in the news about connections between the foods that we eat and our health, both good and bad. Recently, researchers for The World Cancer Research Fund have said that more than 22,000 cases of cancer every year could be prevented if the whole population was a healthy weight. According to the WCRF, body weight increases the risk of cancers of the pancreas, breast, bowel, oesophagus, kidney, womb and gall bladder. Isn't this a good enough reason to encourage people to seriously look at what they are eating and replace the bad stuff with the good? Just think of the savings on the health system, let alone the numbers of people who are able to manage their pain and symptoms through a healthy and nutritious diet and becoming happier and positive people.

For years, I suffered myself from frequent bouts of thrush and cystitis, which gradually became more recurrent, together with random symptoms such as digestive and menstrual problems, dizzy spells and migraine auras, mood swings, lack of concentration, tonsillitis, to name but a few. I have led a pretty hedonistic lifestyle and have always been lucky enough not to worry too much about my weight. At the time I kept on drinking too much alcohol, smoking cigarettes and eating whatever

I liked. Around 2003, it all came to a head. I was suffering on a daily basis. Antibiotics no longer had any effect and every GP test I had undergone came back negative for any infection, except vaginal swabs showing a little thrush. So why was I in so much pain and discomfort? I was spiralling downwards with depression and felt that there was no light at the end of the tunnel. I was away from home travelling in Australia at the time and what was meant to be an amazing trip became some of the most painful and uncomfortable months of my life.

Upon my return home, I felt seriously ill. I was referred to a urologist who diagnosed me with Interstitial Cystitis (IC). However, a friend suggested that a visit to her nutritionist to see if my problems could be associated with food intolerances. I was at the end of my tether and willing to give anything a go. Thankfully, she made the right call and that appointment changed my life. Using kinesiology, Katherine my nutritionist, diagnosed me with an overgrowth of Candida. Candida is a little-known organism that can be found living naturally in small amounts in the mucous membranes (e.g. mouth, vagina, rectum) in our digestive system, or on our skin, causing us no problems.

However, when someone's immune system is compromised, or the numbers of 'friendly' bacteria in our gut are diminished through over-use of antibiotics, long-term bad diet, or heavy metal toxicity from our environment, Candida can change into its fungal state, where the spore has roots which attach to the walls of the intestines. Without early treatment, these spores go through the gut wall (known as Leaky Gut Syndrome) into the rest of the body via the bloodstream, wreaking havoc in our genitals, sinuses, lungs and muscles, which are just a few of its favourite destinations. Candida overgrowth can lead to food intolerances and nutritional deficiencies. It produces numerous toxins in our body, which affect individuals in many different ways with different symptoms. Candida overgrowth has also been associated with auto-immune illnesses such as ME, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and fibromyalgia. There are also some professionals who believe there is a link between Candida and cancer.

Katherine discussed with me how I was going to get my Candida under control and recommended an extremely restricted diet and a course of anti-fungals and supplements to be taken in conjunction with this.

Oh boy, was I miserable for the next couple of months! What on earth do you cook when you're told you cannot eat wheat, dairy, gluten, sugar (and its various derivatives), fruit, alcohol, yeast, caffeine, smoked/cured non-organic meats, vinegar and fermented products, mushrooms, nuts and citric acid?! I lived on carrot bread made with wholewheat flour for weeks until I found out it contained gluten. It was no good, so I had to knuckle down in the kitchen and make the best of what I had to work with.

This struggle inspired me, like the practitioners I mentioned above, to help others by writing a survival guide and specialist 'free-from' cookbook for Candida (and also helpful for IC) sufferers. *Candida Can Be Fun!* was self-published in March 2011 and is a frank, humorous and honest account of what it is like to live with Candida overgrowth and how to overcome it. The book tells you how to get started, what foodstuffs you *can* eat on this extremely restricted diet and offers brand products that are safe, as well as stating where to source them. The 100 fully colour-illustrated savoury meals are simple, tasty, nutritious and easy to make. The meal ideas are designed to offer a degree of variety. One of the biggest reasons for people to fall off the wagon on the anti-Candida diet is usually the blandness and repetitiveness of the food. This doesn't have to be the case here. Around 60% of the meals are vegetarian or vegan and some of those with meat and fish can be substituted by other vegetables, pulses or tofu. Complex carbohydrates can gradually be phased in after a couple of weeks of the diet (as these have to be kept to a minimum) and meals bulked up with protein, salads, a rainbow of different vegetables including green leafy varieties. The recipes themselves are also suitable and beneficial for diabetics, coeliacs and those wishing to lose weight sensibly and nutritiously.

There are so many different diets out there these days and you have to find the right one for you. However, I believe that the anti-Candida diet is a good basis for a healthy and nutritious one, regardless of whether or not you have an overgrowth of Candida.

As you say in Ireland: *Sláinte mhaith!*

For more information and to order your copy of *Candida Can Be Fun!* please visit my web site: www.candidacanbefun.co.uk

