

# “Many clients are at the end of their tether, having received the all-clear from several practitioners, but they are still feeling unwell”



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## Where did you study and how long did it take for you to qualify?

I completed my three-year diploma in nutritional therapy at the Institute for Optimum Nutrition (ION) in Richmond this year.

## Where do you practise?

I practise from central London therapy rooms and conduct Skype consultations from my home in North London.

## What's your main therapy/modality and why?

My main modality is nutritional therapy. I take a very holistic view of health and treat each client as unique. I focus on diet, lifestyle, exercise, sleep, stress, relationships and family history when looking at a case.

## Why did you decide to become a practitioner?

Focusing on the body's own ability to return to optimal health has been a real interest of mine. Given the right combination of nutrients, specific to each individual, can help bring the body's imbalances back in line. I started my career in finance many years ago and would often see colleagues over-worked, stressed and generally unhealthy. I would give them informal health tips, and someone told me that I should pursue that as a career. This is how my journey started. I have also struggled with PMS for many



years and manage it through a healthy diet and lifestyle.

## How long have you been in practice?

I started my practice in January, with the most up-to-date health knowledge and a passion for helping others with their wellness journey.

## Who or what has been the main influence/inspiration on your practice?

When I started my studies, I was surprised to learn that nutrition does not form a large part of medical doctor training. Even thousands of years ago, Hippocrates knew that food is medicine. I am in awe of medical doctors that are in touch with functional medicine



and nutrition, like Mark Hyman, Ragan Chatterjee, Ruby Aujla, to name a few. I listen to their podcasts and have attended talks by them and love the way they are spreading the word on the key to better health, nutrition. Dr Hyman did a great docuseries called, *The Broken Brain*, which was hugely inspirational. It really helped me understand the gut/brain connection.

## What conditions or types of client do you see most of?

Stressed office workers and mums with little time, looking for an easy-to-follow guide to better health, are my most frequent clients. I find that I can relate to

being stressed in the office, as that was me for many years. Finding methods that work for them comes naturally to me. I also work with mums, as several of my friends and family are busy, stay-at-home or working mums.

I cover many different conditions, such as digestive, skin, mood, hormone and immune issues. I have a particular interest in gut issues, as I believe that the gut is linked to numerous adverse conditions. I often advise clients to start with healing their gut and they generally notice a change in their overall health.

## How would you describe your general approach?

Each individual is unique, so my approach to working with clients involves getting to know them, what they eat, how they sleep, their stressors, their exercise routine, what medications and supplements they take, etc. A client completes a comprehensive questionnaire before the initial consultation. I do a rigorous analysis of their answers and then we work together in the session to come up with ways to implement changes. I use various tools in my sessions, as achieving optimal health is not purely focused on food.

## What is your favourite type of client?

Someone who is willing to make changes to improve their health. The sessions are very collaborative, I work with clients to come up with ideas that fit in with their lifestyle.

## What is the most challenging type of symptoms/illness/problem that you get presented with?

Many clients who visit me are at the end of their tether, having received

the all-clear from several medical and complementary practitioners, but still feeling unwell. Having the time in my practice to devote to the individual without feeling rushed really helps these clients open up. This relaxed, comfortable therapeutic encounter can already make a big difference.

I often see clients with skin conditions such as psoriasis who have received steroid creams from their doctors. They come and see me as they don't want to use these creams for the rest of their lives, and they do notice certain links between a flare up of their condition and nutrition/lifestyle. When skin conditions manifest it is often because the body has been exposed to adverse elements for quite some time and is crying out for help. It can take some time to calm these reactions down, but often the client will want to see fast results as they are in physical pain. It is challenging to keep the client motivated to change, as it can be a slow process.

### **What one thing is absolutely essential to you in your practice?**

Helping the client feel relaxed enough to open up and talk about their journey is essential. Creating a comfortable, laid-back yet professional environment where the client feels at ease is important in the therapeutic process.

### **Do you enhance your business with any projects outside of your clinic?**

I really enjoy attending food festivals, where I promote low-sugar healthy desserts and spread the nutrition for health word. I write regular blog posts reflecting the latest research and knowledge attained from my CPD attendances. Although nutritional therapy is unique to the individual, there are certain diet and lifestyle changes that can help everyone. I summarised the essential tips for improved digestion into a self-directed, *35 Days to Improved Digestion Plan* with videos. I am also currently working on a detox programme.

These programmes can be used by people who would like to see changes in their health but cannot, for whatever reason, commit



to consultations. The plans are suitable for vegans, vegetarians and meat-eaters and are not suitable for individuals with severe medical conditions.

I'm also currently working on "Cook and Learn" sessions, where I demonstrate cooking a simple meal at a cookery school, while educating the class on the health benefits of this meal. It'll be a fun environment where like-minded individuals can come together and share their passion for cooking and nutrition. I will also provide handouts after the session to summarise what was taught.

### **Which CAM book has helped or inspired you most, so far in your career?**

*The Gut*, by Guilia Enders, is a great read. Her book is easy to follow and fun to read. She incorporates funny illustrations to keep things interesting. *The Disease Delusion*, by Dr Jeffrey Bland, is also inspirational. The science is simple to understand, and it really highlights the importance of nutrition in the fight against chronic disease.

### **Why do you do what you do?**

I am very much against a pill for every ill. I believe that a lot of people rely way too much on medication to relieve symptoms. Let's look at the root cause. Assessing an individual's family

history, triggers and factors that are keeping them sick and working on realigning potential imbalances seems like a logical way forward for the health industry. I am passionate about playing a role in spreading the nutritional therapy word and helping people live better lives.

### **If money, time and effort were no object, what one thing would you change about your practice or integrative healthcare/CAM in general?**

This is a great thought! I would dedicate resources on spreading the nutritional word. Many people are not aware of the difference between nutritional therapy, nutritionists and dieticians and the benefits that lifestyle changes can have on their health. I would use marketing campaigns, seminars, articles and workshops to share the knowledge. I would also like to work on functional medicine programmes with medical doctors, so they can potentially incorporate it in their practices. This will focus on looking at the root causes of disease and prevention.

### **Although you've just started up yourself, what piece of advice would you give to newly-qualified practitioners who are setting up a business?**

It takes time to develop a successful nutritional practice. Keep at it and stay motivated, as the world needs



nutritional therapists. Starting out can seem daunting, but it's worth it in the end. Gaining traction and spreading the word can be really challenging in the beginning, but staying true to what you believe in and hard work will pay off.

### **What is the biggest challenge you face as a practitioner?**

Nutritional therapists are often self-employed and have to wear many hats. I was determined to learn all elements of business and build my practice myself, developing the website, marketing material, accounts, etc. But these things can take me away from my main focus, which is helping others and developing my knowledge. In the future, I'd like to build my Live Better Health brand so that I can hire other practitioners and take away their business-building burden, giving them more time to focus on the nutritional therapy.

### **What would you like to see covered in IHCAN magazine that we're not getting to?**

I am always interested to read about the gut/brain connection and the progress that nutritional therapists are making with mental health.



## Case study Low-energy, PMS – escalating anxiety after coming off the Pill

A 33-year-old female, was seeking advice on how to improve her health after coming off the oral contraceptive pill.

She had been taking the Pill for 13 years and stopped using it after she discovered that it may cause nutrient deficiencies and she will be trying for a baby next year. Her premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and anxiety escalated after coming off the Pill.

A cervical smear test in 2013 revealed abnormal cells; a colposcopy was done. Reoccurring cystitis had started in 2012 due to stress; she took antibiotics and cut down on sugar. She had antibiotics again, in early 2015, for cystitis. After a bereavement in 2015, she experienced severe stress.

She does not take any prescribed or over-the-counter medication and takes vitamin D (10mcg daily) seasonally and a probiotic (ten strains of live bacteria).

### Symptoms

Her presenting symptoms at the first consultation were dry hair, eyes and skin, sneezing, slow healing skin, stretch marks, cellulite, easy bruising, thread veins, allergic reactions, aching joints, anxiety, mood swings, irritability, inability to switch off, easily frustrated, panic attacks, frequent colds, chest infections, cramping gut, acid reflux, belching, cystitis and had no red flags. She was seeking support for low energy and PMS.

She did not undertake regular exercise and had a high toxic load, working and living near a busy road, drinking alcohol (four units per week), was using aluminium foil in cooking and had 20% organic foods.

Her energy levels were low, with significant dips at 4pm, and she often felt drowsy during the day and dizzy and irritable if she did not eat frequently. Her PMS symptoms were bloating, tiredness, irritability and breast tenderness. She craved chocolate and crisps and sometimes binged on sweets.

She consumed take-away meals frequently and did not consume protein and vegetables with each meal. Refined carbohydrate consumption was high, her essential fatty acid and fibre consumption was low. She had several cups of tea per day. She worked long hours and infrequently had eight hours sleep per night, which was often interrupted.

### Initial thoughts

The client's use of the Pill, her toxic load and her dietary insufficiencies may have led to her state of ill-health. Her antibiotic usage, surgery and bereavement stress may have triggered her health issues. Her compromised

energy production, potential adrenal, thyroid, hormone and blood-sugar imbalances and dysbiosis may have been keeping her in this state.

The Pill can cause nutrient deficiencies – particularly vitamins B6, B12 and folate – which could go some way to explaining her low energy. It can also increase the body's circulation of pro-inflammatory cytokines, potentially exacerbating suspected gut issues.

Antibiotics significantly lower the levels of intestinal bacteria required to convert oestrogen to the more active form for recirculation. Antibiotic usage may also have contributed to her gut issues of cramping, acid reflux and belching. Her PMS symptoms may indicate that she has comparatively high oestrogen to progesterone levels. Excessive alcohol intake and toxin exposure could be adding strain to liver detoxification processes and hindering oestrogen clearance; her low intake of water, protein and vegetables could make this worse.

Her high toxic exposure could also be increasing circulating xeno-oestrogens in her body, further contributing to her suspected hormonal imbalance.

The abnormal smear test could indicate a compromised immune response. Post-surgical and emotional stress can cause chronic cortisol elevation, potentially leading to a general slowing down (symptoms of low mood, low energy and food cravings), lowering T3 production. This also adversely impacts blood sugar levels, which is further exacerbated by her excessive refined carbohydrate intake. These stressors can also cause immunological disturbances suppressing host defences to pathological microbes causing suspected dysbiosis, further aggravated by prolonged antibiotic usage. Dysbiosis suspected due to her abdominal cramps, bloating, belching, anxiety, mood swings, low energy and dry skin, hair and eyes.

### The intervention

The initial strategy focused on replenishing the body with nutrients potentially depleted by prolonged oral contraceptive usage, removing dietary triggers, and increasing anti-inflammatory foods and water intake.

Food sources of commonly-depleted nutrients (zinc, magnesium, folate, selenium and vitamins B2, E, C, B6 and B12) from the Pill were recommended – such as seafood, nuts, seeds, grains, vegetables, fruits, poultry, red meat and eggs. I advised her to limit caffeine to lower cortisol and to decrease refined carbohydrate consumption to prevent blood sugar spikes.

I explained that refined carbohydrates can also promote the growth of inflammatory gut microbes, so reducing these can potentially aid in dysbiosis relief.

Lowering caffeine intake also addressed her interrupted sleep.

I suggested she drank more water, to help support liver detoxification. I asked her to eat wild-caught, organic, oily fish at least twice a week to lower inflammation, help regulate blood sugar and hormone levels.

Lifestyle recommendations to aid in lowering stress levels and support digestion were to use a meditation app, do yoga, increase exercise and practise sleep hygiene. The client was eager to download a meditation app, watch and do yoga from YouTube videos at home and get off the train one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way to work.

### Outcome

The strategy was effective: the client reported that she managed to implement the changes, which had positive effects on her symptoms and overall wellbeing. She noticed an improvement in her energy levels, mood and PMS symptoms.

The strategy eased the client into big changes by starting off slowly. She noticed significant changes to her health after three sessions, over three months with me. She was a lot happier and found it easier to implement changes as the weeks went by.

### Progress

The client noticed significant change in her health after three sessions and opted to stop there and take up further sessions when trying for a baby next year. She wants to test to see if her dysbiosis has cleared before conceiving, as the effects of this can be passed on to the baby.

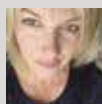
She was very motivated to maintain her progress. The changes fitted in nicely with her lifestyle, and she did not foresee any issues keeping them up.

### Learnings

Small changes can make a big difference. Pacing the protocol and not doing too much at once can make it more manageable and sustainable.

### What the client said

"I have really appreciated the support and guidance that Michelle has given me over the last three months. The insights into diet and energy support have created a framework that I could align with and has helped me to make the changes that I needed to. Michelle provides not only nutritional advice, but a holistic approach to wellbeing, to bring balance".



We know our practitioners are quietly getting on with changing people's lives, every day – and we want to celebrate and share the inspiration. In Practice is coordinated by regular contributor Rebecca Smith, who runs a successful practice of her own, established 20 years ago. Contact her direct to be part of the feature: [rebecca@newportcomplementaryhealthclinic.co.uk](mailto:rebecca@newportcomplementaryhealthclinic.co.uk), and follow her on Twitter: @NCHHealthClinic.