

Can these milk alternatives help MS?



MSer and Feature Writer **Ian Cook** investigates the rise of milk alternatives and if they help or hinder MS

Milk, particularly cow's milk, has often had a bad press in the multiple sclerosis (MS) world, particularly because several MSers believe it plays a central role in the illness.

The reason for this belief is that MS is more common in countries where lots of milk is consumed and there have been various explanations for why this is. The basic theory is that proteins from dairy permeate the lining of our guts, throwing the door to the bloodstream wide open for all sorts of things—including bacteria—that then wreak havoc on the brain and other parts of the body.

The science

A variant of this theory is that certain proteins in cows' milk are very similar to myelin basic protein and a process of molecular mimicry causes cells in the immune system to mistakenly attack myelin basic protein when milk is consumed, starting off the process of autoimmunity that causes MS. For years a case has been made for milk as a factor in causing MS, however, the pendulum now seems to be swinging the other way.

Liz Rostand is Director of IgBioscience, a small company producing 100% pure organic colostrum. Known colloquially as first milk, colostrum is the milk produced by mammals including humans immediately after giving birth. It contains antibodies to protect the newborn against disease and its protein concentration is substantially higher

than that in later milk. Colostrum is known to contain immune cells and many other cells which form some of the components of the immune system. Colostrum also contains a number of growth factors.

At IgBioscience Liz and her team produce ethically sourced colostrum from a small cooperative of organic hill farms in Wales. IgBioscience's first product "Immuster" has been helping people with autoimmune disorders including MS and has a growing client base of people reporting significant improvements in their health. Liz Rostand has MS herself and says colostrum has made a major difference to her symptoms and was the reason she helped start up the company.

Lived experience

Liz's experience of MS began in 1989 when she was 26. "I was seen by a specialist at London's Moorfields Eye Hospital for Optic Neuritis. Three years later I had a terrible attack and was bedridden and off work for six weeks. The medical establishment called my MS relapsing remitting."

Liz started taking colostrum in 2016. At the time she says she was constantly tired. "I was at the stage where my legs had become so weak, and my balance was so affected, that everyday things were becoming very difficult.

"I heard about pure colostrum from an Australian journalist friend. He'd been caring for his wife for 1



years – a ballet dancer who'd declined fairly rapidly and I needed to use a wheelchair. They had heard about pure colostrum (very, very hard to find) and tried it. The Australian journalist's wife Shauna now no longer uses a wheelchair and leads an active life with her family and friends. She became a good friend and an inspiration for me."

After taking colostrum for just two days Liz says she started to feel a lot better. Within nine months she was able to walk seven miles throughout the day on a holiday in Barcelona, with no ill effects.

"Before colostrum, I had never gone away with friends because I was so worried about my MS ruining their time away. So socially it has been completely life changing and I feel more able to join in with everything - swimming, dog walking and just sharing more. I hadn't realised how alone and lonely MS was making me feel. I am now so much stronger - I am not cured and it's important to stress this is not a cure - but it can work wonders alleviating the symptoms of autoimmune disorders. My overall health has improved dramatically - I can exercise regularly, I can go for walks with friends (which I could never do before)."

Liz says the medical establishment now calls her MS "Benign MS". She explains: "I haven't seen anyone for MS for about three years now. They can't categorise me and I confuse them as they can't explain the alleviation in my symptoms. So I feel their time is best spent helping others whose need is greater than mine for the time being."

It was for this reason that Liz set up IgBioscience which sells colostrum to people with MS and other auto-immune conditions. "We've had so much success with it, helping other people living with autoimmune conditions. I - and now many others - are living testimony to this."

Something different

Colostrum isn't the only milk to have attracted attention as a possible treatment for MS. Recently there has been much interest in camel's milk which has become available at selected branches of the supermarket ASDA, as well as being more widely sold online. Camel's milk has a high concentration of immunoglobulins, which help to boost the body's immune system. Though similar to the immunoglobulins in humans, the ones found in camel's milk are smaller and therefore absorbed more easily by the body. It is believed that since the immune system in autoimmune diseases like MS is compromised, consuming these immunoglobulins may aid in alleviating the severity of the condition.

While the verdict is still open on whether its powers can alleviate conditions like MS, at the very least, camel's milk is a suitable dairy alternative to cow's milk. And although I thought it was a joke when I first heard about it, as did one cartoonist who put it: "Camel's milk, one hump or two?" it would seem that camel's milk for MSers may in fact be no laughing matter. Far from it.