



Itching Insanity:

How a Neighbor Naturally Resolved Candida, Leaky Gut, and Food Sensitivities

By Stephanie Colo Manning

River Creek resident Mary (not her real name) shares her story about a terrible, itchy rash that tormented her day and night, the depression that followed, and how she naturally resolved the root causes.

Background - *Candida albicans* is a type of yeast that normally lives harmoniously in the body. However, this fungus can overgrow when gut bacteria becomes unbalanced. It then produces powerful toxins that can lead to a leaky gut; now the GI tract's protective inner lining can no longer block invaders from entering the blood stream. Candida and other instigators can then freely travel through the body to trigger allergies/sensitivities to foods, chemicals, and the environment, and disrupt hormones, cell function, and the nervous system.

Typical symptoms of Candida overgrowth include fatigue, depression, irritability, poor concentration, allergies/sensitivities, low immune function, digestive discomfort, thrush, yeast infections, and menstrual complaints, according to *The Textbook of Natural Medicine*. Skin rashes, athlete's foot, and brain fog may also occur.

People especially vulnerable to a Candida infection include those with a weakened immune system, those taking corticosteroids, antibiotics, or birth control pills, those who overindulge in sugar or alcohol, and those with dentures, according to the CDC and other experts. With today's Western diet, lifestyle, and medications provoking gut bacteria imbalances, conditions are often ripe for Candida to overgrow, particularly in women. With limited treatment choices, increasing drug resistance, and harsh side effects, the need for effective, holistic, anti-Candida measures is growing.

Stephanie: Thank you for sharing your story about how Candida, leaky gut, and food sensitivities disrupted your life and how you resolved them naturally. Can you begin with what led up to this?

Mary: Up until this happened, I considered myself healthy. Since childhood, I've taken antibiotics about once a year; they were prescribed freely and it was no big deal. I had occasional constipation. Since 2011, I've noticed occasional, mild itching. In Summer 2016, my doctor prescribed a steroid cream, which didn't help. Another doctor recommended Zyrtec® every night indefinitely. I thought to myself, "This is not a solution," so I just kept living with the occasional itching.

In Fall 2016, I had some very stressful months, and around Christmas-time I got the flu. I recovered, but I took a Z-Pak (antibiotics) for redness in the ear around New Year's. By mid-January, my itching got worse. This time I was told it was eczema and was prescribed another steroid cream, which didn't help.

By February, a terribly itchy, red rash erupted all over my torso, shoulders, arms, armpits, inner elbows, my entire back and behind my knees. I was scratching everywhere all day long and it kept me up every night. I thought it might be an allergy to the antibiotic, but it didn't go away. I was very worried. It affected my whole life: I couldn't sleep, I was embarrassed to go out, I wanted to hide the rash but certain fabrics would make the itch even worse. Everybody was asking what was wrong with me, and I was so uncomfortable all the time. I became depressed and found myself crying every day, and I was feeling unusual anger and anxiety.

Throughout February, March, and early-April, I saw more doctors. One told me, "I don't think this is eczema, I think it's a fungus," and referred me to another doctor. I was then told, "This may be some illness in your

body," but all my tests came back normal. She prescribed a stronger steroid cream (no improvement), she performed a skin biopsy (normal results), and she finally told me, "The only way you can get rid of this is to take oral steroids." I said to myself, "No, I'm not going to take oral steroids, there is something wrong with me." I asked if diet could have anything to do with it, and I was told, "It's not about diet."

So I started researching. First, I eliminated sugar and gluten, which slightly improved the redness. After talking with you, I understood that further dietary changes could help with things like food sensitivities, Candida, and leaky gut, but I decided to see a Functional Medicine doctor first to rule out anything more serious. She ran several lab tests, and by mid-July she confirmed I had Candida, unbalanced gut bacteria, several food sensitivities, inflammation, and leaky gut. As I look back at my years of antibiotics and itching, this has probably been brewing for a while. Then, a weakened immune system and antibiotics at New Year's gave the Candida an opportunity to overgrow.

The Functional Medicine doctor recommended natural supplements to fight the Candida and strengthen my liver; probiotics and L-glutamine for my gut; fish oil for inflammation; and she suggested I see a nutritionist.

So I started taking the supplements, and then I called you. We talked all about Candida, the benefits of detoxing from it, and various issues that could arise. For example, I was already experiencing a "die-off" (Herxheimer) reaction as the herbs started killing the Candida. You said that when they die, these types of organisms release huge amounts of toxins into the blood stream and can make your symptoms worse. You shared ideas for minimizing this and assured me things would improve. Then we talked about unbalanced gut bacteria, inflammation, leaky gut, and how all these things can lead to food sensitivities. We then talked about options for addressing them and we discussed my motivation; you asked me to decide between different approaches based on what I thought I could stick with. At this point I was **ready** to do **anything**. I had this horrible, itching rash for six months already and I just had to get rid of it. Nobody can understand, unless they've been in the situation, how bad this itching was.

We then created a very structured, customized elimination diet, broken into three phases.

The first goal was to control the itching. Phase I would starve the Candida, would navigate around my food sensitivities, and was anti-inflammatory and gut-healing. I was to eat fresh meats, fish, non-starchy vegetables, and healthy fats. No sugar, bread, fruit, dairy, grains, mold- or yeast-containing foods, nor alcohol. Also, no foods that I had tested sensitive to (bell peppers, eggs, spinach, lettuce, salmon...) I began Phase I in late-July with only a few basic foods, cooked simply from scratch – plain chicken, homemade broth, zucchini, yellow squash, coconut oil, salt, and plenty of water. Every two to three days, I then introduced one new food, very deliberately and well planned. One by one, I tested asparagus, artichokes, onion, broccoli, avocado, olive oil, turkey, cod, garlic, ginger, turmeric, etc. With so many food sensitivities, we had to clearly identify anything that might provoke symptoms, so I kept a food journal and we monitored my progress daily. Soon, we added Daikon radishes, dandelion greens, and beets for better liver detox and bile flow

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This was a very challenging process; it was hard work and took all my patience and commitment. But I could see that it was really working. My daytime itching almost totally disappeared immediately, and within one week, my nighttime itching significantly reduced, too. Within six weeks, the itching just kept dissipating down to nothing. I also began sleeping better.

There were some bumps along the road. Early on, celery and Brussels sprouts triggered more itching, although they had appeared negative on my food sensitivity testing. I also developed constipation and was losing some weight, so I needed to adjust my diet. I had dry, burning skin from the Candida, but it eventually disappeared. Whenever I went to the grocery store or mall, my itching would flare up from the chemicals and fragrances, and for a while I even had to take quick showers without soap, wash my hair in the sink, and stop moisturizing. My liver was working so hard that it couldn't handle these added toxins. To strengthen and protect my liver through this, I added specific supplements.

Once I started taking these liver-supporting supplements, the last bit of itching virtually disappeared. At six weeks, my body began breaking up and releasing the biofilm (a glue-like substance that anchors the Candida.) This was a very good sign; I really turned a corner.

It was very important now to add a wider variety of foods to avoid nutrient deficiency. So Phase 2 began in September with some low-sugar fruits, root vegetables, nuts, and seeds: foods like green apple, pear, carrots, sweet potatoes, butternut squash, almond butter, cashews, lentils, pumpkin seeds. The goal was to carefully expand my diet and keep working on inflammation and leaky gut. This phase probably should have gone quicker, but I got over-excited introducing these sweeter and starchier foods too quickly because some mild itching began returning and I started developing some bloating and belching. I did some testing to rule out Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth (SIBO), which luckily came back

negative. It turns out I had low stomach acid. After adding a supplement to strengthen my stomach acid, the bloating and belching improved. All throughout the holiday season, things went well – a few minor ups and downs, but mostly back to normal.

I was so excited to start Phase 3 in January 2018. Now I could introduce more fruits, rice, oatmeal, and some of the foods I had tested sensitive to. This all went very smoothly. Cheese didn't feel quite right when I tried it, so I listened to my body – I just don't want to eat it now.

I'm so thankful the rashes are gone now. I look in the mirror and can't believe they have completely disappeared and **no more itching** anywhere. Even the mild itching that I've had on-and-off for years is completely gone.

I'm very happy. Last year at this time, I was not happy deep down, but this year I am really happy. There is a fear inside of me that wonders, "What if it comes back?" but it keeps me on track. I'm energetic; I work, travel, and eat out. My friends and family are amazed, some of them question why I did things the way I did, but I know I did it right. Not only did this resolve my itching, but my long-term health will be better, too. For my birthday, my cousin made me a cake. I tried a tiny piece of it and I felt like, "I don't want to." I have no interest in eating junk. Sometimes I crave bread, but it's not worth it. I really distrust the food industry now. I feel bad for our innocent kids; I don't know their future.

Stephanie: It was amazing to watch your progress throughout this. You were extremely motivated and disciplined, you adhered to the plan, and you remained flexible when adjustments were needed. What are your biggest takeaways from this experience?

Mary: Everything starts with the gut. You have to heal your gut. Don't be closed-minded. Look for other options. Do your own research. Listen to people's stories. There's not just one way.

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