



'YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT'

BY JOHN JENKINS

PORSHA BEASLEY, 28, holds a psychology degree from Georgia Southern University, works as a manual checks processor for a large corporation, and has a loving Lab-Pit mix to greet her every day when she arrives home.

She could be any of us. But Porsha has irritable bowel syndrome – IBS for short – further complicated by a fructose allergy. She sees Dr. Satish S.C. Rao, MCG Chief of the Section of Gastroenterology and Hepatology and founding Director of the GRU Digestive Health Center, for her condition. Says Beasley, "Treatment is going well." Four simple words she uses to describe the miraculous, considering the journey she's made to reach this point in her life.

Beasley says, "Normally a person will feel the urge to go to the bathroom, and there's something there; however, not for a person with IBS. I can eat something as small as a pea, get the urge to go, and nothing will be there to eliminate."

What drove her to finally seek treatment was having "constipation on steroids." Eating small amounts, she would feel like she had "just finished Thanksgiving Dinner. And no matter what I was eating, I was unable to eliminate it."

Seeking answers, she was told to drink more water and that it "was normal to eliminate only once or twice a week." And for years, she thought her infrequent bowel movements were the norm.

In 2010, she decided on a lifestyle change: a vegetarian diet, working out, and running. At the beginning, "I couldn't make it one-half mile, but I was determined." After six months, her distance always increasing, she realized she was running up to eight miles. However, the constipation continued; her stomach continued to grow larger; and eliminations occurred only once every two to two-and-a-half weeks.

Beasley says, "It got to the point my stomach looked as if I was seven months

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pregnant, and it was as hard as a tabletop. I began drinking prune juice, taking Milk of Magnesia, even taking Epsom salt. Then I began using magnesium citrate and up to two enemas a day ... I literally could not leave the house."

She decided she could not continue this way and said: "I need a specialist. I need someone to tell me what the problem is other than, 'You're constipated.'"

She began seeing Rao in late 2012. "After testing, Dr. Rao was able to quickly pinpoint the problem," Beasley says. Rao diagnosed her with IBS and a fructose allergy, further tweaking Beasley's diet. He also enrolled her several months ago in his study of Linzess, a drug she continues to take. Although not back to "normal," she no longer has to sprint to the bathroom after eating something as small as a pea.

However, Beasley says, "Even harder than the elimination diet

they were resistant to it."

Often she was accused by her family of being offensive because she would not eat. While on vacation with them, she succumbed to the pressure. "I took in a tablespoon of this and that, and I became so sick that I became debilitated. I was sick for weeks. They [my family] had to witness this and realized there was nothing they could do to make it better. Once they saw, they began to say, 'Maybe Dr. Rao has a point.' They slowly began showing support and understanding. But it's still a process, because they don't fully understand: They don't understand the digestive process - what foods become when they break down and how this can affect me."

Although anti-anxiety drugs have been suggested, Beasley says, "I flat refuse. I want to accomplish this without them. I cannot pop a pill every time life gets overwhelming. I prefer learning coping skills: If I take my

toms when I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. A pill is not the answer, and America has to get that; you have to do your part." She says she truly appreciates Rao's discussing all approaches with her and not emphasizing anti-anxiety meds.

Instead of anti-anxiety medications, she continues to run. Her personal best distance is 17.5 miles. "It's my therapy," Beasley says. Running has helped to control her stress, and she says, "It's discipline to get up and run 16 to 17 miles, so when I return home, my brain is set right: I'm going to be more focused and conscious of what I'm taking in, because you have to properly fuel your body to run - so running is my checks-and-balances ... and another benefit: You drop a lot of weight."

When asked how her experience with IBS has affected her, Beasley says, "At first, I was angry, but not now. It's frustrating, alienating, has its complications. But I'm grateful: Now, I pay attention to everything I eat. I don't shop the inside aisles of the grocery store anymore. I've become a more open-minded, educated person. And I emphasize education when talking to others about my condition." Her message? "Know what you are putting into your body!"

She issues a challenge to everyone: "You are what you eat: cut out things with high preservatives and see how you feel. See if you notice any difference, even in clarity of mind. Try to avoid gluten; pay attention to the difference in your stress level when facing situations that have upset you in the past."

Her gratitude to Dr. Rao is immense: Even though she recently moved to Los Angeles, she will be traveling back to MCG to continue her treatment with him. ■

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has been the lack of understanding and support; it's truly been the hardest part of dealing with this."

Getting the support of her family has been "a struggle; it's still a struggle," she says. "They thought Dr. Rao was crazy and I was crazy for believing him. It didn't make sense to them, so

morning run, but then go through a difficult day, I will run or swim that night, also - if that's what it takes to cope with the stress."

This creed she also applies to her IBS medication: taking Linzess "does not mean I can get anything out of a vending machine, pop a pill, and be fine. The Linzess helps treat the symp-