

Interview with Christy Svanemyr

Tess's and Cindy's good friend, Christy, recently had a *big* health scare. While she's only 31 and has always looked the picture of health, Christy has had a history of gut problems and recently had an emergency appendectomy. Sent home with antibiotics and pain pills, Christy continued to feel lousy and listless far longer than expected.



A slow and painful recovery led her to Dr. Hugo Rodier's office, where she finally got to the root of her long-time belly upsets. Dr. Rodier put Christy on his standard 8-week intestinal cleanse and rejuvenation diet using five basic Co-op products: [Probiotics 16](#), [Pancreatic Enzymes](#), [Fish Oil](#), [Vitamin D3](#) and [Constant Health](#).

This kat decided that Christy's story was an important one, as many (even quite young) people have gut problems that go unrecognized and cause all sorts of mischief. As background, Christy is a certified Integral Coach, a Zen monk, and a gifted expressive dance and embodiment teacher.

OHC: Christy, when did you start having gut troubles?

Christy Svanemyr: I grew up in West Virginia where organic foods were never the norm. I struggled with digestion since college. I partied and ate all sorts of typical college fare. Beer, pizza, ice cream, you name it. I gained a lot of weight and began noticing problems with bloating and abdominal pain, but I **didn't know what was making me feel so terrible because I just wasn't paying attention.**

Eventually I caught on that dairy was causing me problems, so I started taking lactase while continuing to eat dairy products. It helped but not enough.

When I moved West several years later, I started to eat more whole and organic foods. I changed to soymilk. I started eating salads every day for lunch. And, **thankfully, I started losing the weight I'd put on in college.**

Around that time I started to become more conscious of how foods affected me. I started noticing that when I'd eat pasta, I'd bloat up. So I had less bread, less dairy, less alcohol, and turned to more protein and veggies.

While I still struggled with belly upsets, none of my doctors were the least bit concerned and certainly no one suspected a [chronic appendicitis](#).

OHC: Let's fast-forward to fall 2009 when your health took a dramatic turn for the worst. What happened?

CS: I had been incredibly stressed from planning my wedding last year. I literally felt like I might explode. Work was crazy, the Zen center was gearing up for the year's biggest event, and here I am a newlywed -- **exhausted.**

After yoga one day I just burst into tears. I couldn't keep doing it all. The pace was killing me, I was so exhausted, and yet I didn't have any vacation days to take time off.

Not a week later, I traveled to teach a somatic class. I spent the weekend reconnecting with my body and, at the end of the class on Sunday, I went to a spa. I felt this immense decompression from all the stress.

However, I had no idea my trip to the emergency room was just a week away.

OHC: What happened that first night?

CS: Well, after dinner my stomach was not happy. I felt like I'd eaten something bad. I had severe abdominal cramping all night and the pain slowly migrated to my lower right abdomen. A year earlier a bodyworker told me a valve down there could sometimes trap food and cause discomfort. She taught me to massage it. I tried, but no luck. I was up all night in pain.

The next morning I felt even more bloated and uncomfortable. I was used to frequent belly aches, but this seemed extreme and I kept feeling worse, not better.

The pain and discomfort lasted for a week. I should have known something wasn't right when I couldn't even button my pants, but I didn't know what it could be. The next weekend, I devoted myself to sensing into my belly. I tried to understand what was going on and tried to consciously relax and respond. The next day, the pain was gone and I thought I'd succeeded in my mind-body medicine effort. That was short-lived.

Later that night the pain was back with a vengeance. I rushed to the drug store to pick up Pepto Bismal and Gas-X -- which I never use, but I was desperate -- and neither product remotely helped with the pain. I was up *all* night in absolute agony.

My husband, Vegar told me I wasn't allowed to complain anymore unless I went to the doctor. He was really worried. I didn't call anyone that night, but by morning I had a fever and I started to get worried. I made an appointment with "the gut whisperer," a local gastroenterologist who came highly recommended.

I also called Tess and she wondered if it was my appendix. When I looked up the symptoms for a ruptured appendix online, they fit me to a tee. Unfortunately, I ended up going to the wrong place and missed my doctor's appointment. The next appointment wasn't for two days.

By that evening, though, I was scared and in enough pain that I went to a local walk-in clinic. The intake nurse began touching my belly and I yelped. Man did it hurt! The nurse said quite dramatically, "You've just won yourself a trip to the Emergency Room!"

Turns out my appendix, which should have been the size of a dime, had ruptured and was the size of an apricot. The surgeon said it was one of the worst cases of appendicitis that he's ever seen (and he does up to three appendectomies a day, year in and year out).

OHC: What a painful experience. I understand your recovery didn't go well either.

CS: Not at all. After my surgery, I had terrible constipation from all the antibiotics they gave me. I tried fibers, but that just made things worse. It was awful. Three weeks after the surgery, I just couldn't bounce back. I had no attention span, no ability to focus, no energy. It seemed like people were moving at warp speed and I couldn't even carry on a basic conversation.

When I tried to call the surgeon, the nurse wouldn't let me talk to him and told me that everything I'd been feeling must just be a parallel incident! She said if there was no further infection and my wounds were healing, I should be fine.

I was shocked. Again, I was being told I was just fine and yet I knew I wasn't doing well. This moment is so vivid in my memory, as it marked the moment when I knew I had to venture outside Western medicine.

OHC: Where did you turn for help?

CS: I talked at length with Cindy, who shared her own appendicitis story with me. The similarities were eerie. She too had had pains that doctors had written off as unremarkable. She had actually suffered from chronic appendicitis for a few years before she finally was rushed to an emergency room in excruciating pain. Looking back, I am sure my appendix was at the root of my belly problems.

Cindy encouraged me to go see Dr. Rodier to help me get my health back on track after everything I'd been through. It was a huge relief to learn that his services were covered by my insurance as I already owed over \$3,000 for my surgery and stay in the hospital. I felt really exhausted and vulnerable. Cindy and Tess were great, supporting me through the whole process.

Tess was so sweet. I didn't feel well enough to drive and I wanted a friend there who understood what questions to ask.

At first it was all so overwhelming to me. I didn't see the connection between all the supplements Dr. Rodier asked me to take and what they would do for me. I also didn't like the idea of being dependent on a whole bunch of supplements at 31 either. But I was desperate to feel better as I certainly wasn't able to work or enjoy my life the way things were going. Since I totally trusted Cindy and

Tess, I decided to try the new diet Dr. Rodier recommended.

OHC: How did you fare on Dr. Rodier's protocol?

CS: I started [the cleanse](#) diet right away. I'll confess. The first two weeks were hell. I became even more exhausted. I was sleeping 11 or 12 hours a night and experiencing the mild flu-like symptoms of detox. I was assured this was normal, that my body was detoxing and that I was going to feel worse before I felt better. I'd done enough cleanses to know I needed to hang in there, but can imagine a lot of people going off the diet at that point.

In the third week, when I reintroduced fruit, I felt like my life came back to me almost overnight. I remember going to the corner market and just gorging on berries. They tasted amazing and, having felt nauseous for so long, I was so thankful to enjoy my food again.

I felt the best I'd felt in I couldn't remember how long. I had clarity, ease, and best of all, energy. The nutrition had really kicked in, and between the stuff I got from the Co-op and the iodine and adrenal support products a naturopath had recommended, I was feeling so good!

OHC: How has your view of health changed? What can you say about having faced such dramatic health challenges at your age?

CS: That sense of invincibility wears off toward your late 20s. It did for me at least, and I've heard a lot of my friends say the same thing. More of my friends are paying attention to which foods work best for them.

Even my Norwegian husband -- who used to live on bread, cheese, and beer -- has changed his habits. He notices he's a lot more connected to his food and feels more fulfilled when he prepares something at home.

I know that when I'm really busy, it's harder for me to stay conscious of my choices and I'm more prone to eating foods on-the-go. I am working on slowing down and eating more consciously. It's hard for me to limit my diet because I actually love food, all kinds of food! I'll never be a master of depriving myself, but I try to eat more raw foods with enzymes, a salad every day, and plenty of protein.

OHC: What a journey. How are you doing now?

CS: I'm doing well. I attribute the most change to the [Probiotics 16](#) and [Pancreatic Enzymes](#). My stomach used to hurt so often that pain was part of the norm. Now it rarely hurts anymore. I was so grateful for having access to the Co-op's products because Dr. Rodier had me taking so many capsules of **probiotics each day in the beginning. There's no way I could have afforded** buying more expensive store brands, so I would have probably taken less to save money.

The best thing about having gone through Dr. Rodier's cleanse diet is that I notice I have a stronger tolerance for foods that used to give me a lot of trouble. I still notice I'll bloat a bit if I have something like wheat pasta, but I'm **not on the floor in pain anymore. I can feel my system getting stronger, and for** that I'm incredibly grateful.

Now, I've also got my sister and my dad ordering your [Probiotics 16](#). The problems I have clearly run in our family. Since both my dad and sister have struggled with tummy trouble and regularity, I think they'll become converts to **probiotics pretty quickly!**

As Christy said, she *loves* food, which means even on a restricted diet, she created some delicious dishes. I thought we should share some of Christy's recipes for those of you considering your own personal cleanse on the [Dr. Rodier diet](#).

Recipe #1 - Kale & Spice Scramble

Sautee ginger, garlic and onion in coconut or olive oil in small skillet.

Scramble eggs in separate skillet.

(If you put the eggs in with the kale, the kale gets limp, so Christy found that separating the ingredients improved the textures and flavors!)

Combine kale with scrambled eggs and add pumpkin and/or sesame seeds. You can add chicken sausage for extra protein. Goes very well with a little hot

sauce. Enjoy!

Recipe #2 - Cabbage & Coconut Sautee

Sautee mustard seeds in coconut or olive oil on medium heat until the seeds begin to "pop."

Add chopped onions and/or chillies for more spice.

Add chopped purple or green cabbage and sautee together with mustard seeds, onions, and chillies. Add shredded coconut and mix well.