

Investing in Digestive Health Research to Save Her Life

By Catherine Mulvale



Sara Blake, author of *Food intolerance*

Sara Blake is a detective trying to solve a problem which is threatening her life. Gradually losing the ability to digest most foods, Sara has suffered for years. Ingesting ingredients that her body finds offensive brings on a barrage of symptoms that cause sleep deprivation and malnutrition so severe that she has been emaciated several times.

"I'm thin," says Sara. "If you were to meet me on the street, you would think I am healthy and fit." What people see on the outside belies the seriousness of the challenges she lives with every day. Sara has suffered symptoms so debilitating that at one point, she actually stopped planning for her future and started planning for her own demise.

"I'm the type of person who looks at problems with the intent to solve them," she says. "Each time the problem appeared to evade solution, I got concerned."

Fortunately, Sara is currently managing to keep herself healthy. And, now that she has stabilized her health, Sara is dedicated to problem-solving on a larger scale. She has written the book, *Food Intolerance*, and is investing in research.



She wants to help others who suffer from similar challenges by supporting research into the digestive system and the gut microbiota, which is the collective reference to the trillions of microorganisms living in our digestive tract.

Sara is an intelligent woman. She is a respected lawyer, a speaker and an author. She is thoughtful, compassionate and determined. When Sara decided to make a donation to advance science, she went looking for a respected partner and found it in the Canadian Digestive Health Foundation (CDHF). It was important to Sara that the research be connected with hospitals and academic centres so that she could be confident it would meet national scientific and ethical standards.

"I have a serious health issue that needs to be solved," Sara states calmly. "I want to help address the challenges that all people with food intolerances endure but there is only so much one individual can do. I'm not a scientist. Digestion is very complex. What goes on in the gastrointestinal tract as it processes food is complex and not well-understood.

While I can't provide the millions of dollars necessary to unravel all of the mysteries of this system, I can

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make a meaningful contribution to help get us closer to understanding the role that bacteria play in the gastrointestinal tract."

Sara's hope is that her contribution of \$150,000 to the CDHF will support basic science in the area of the gastrointestinal microbiome and, equally importantly, offer hope to those affected by food intolerances.

Sara knows that the workings of the digestive system are a very complex mystery but encourage those facing challenges similar to hers not to despair. Her eternal optimism leads her to believe that the research she supports will help others protect and enhance their overall health.