

# Homeopathy: What You May Wish to Know

## Homeopathic Principles

The principles of homeopathy were first formulated at the end of the eighteenth century by Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician. He had given up the practice of medicine when he found the therapies of his time to be ineffective and extremely harmful, and did not resume practice until he discovered in homeopathy a means to help people heal gently, rapidly and reliably. Homeopathy spread quickly throughout Europe and to the United States, where at the beginning of the Twentieth century 15-20% of all doctors were homeopaths. Despite repeated criticism from orthodox medical circles, the validity of Hahnemann's ideas continue to be demonstrated over 200 years later.

*Stimulus to the body.* Homeopathic treatment, like all truly natural therapies, seeks to stimulate the innate healing power of the individual so that all physiological systems function at their best. As the person moves toward her or his optimal level of general health, she or he feels better. But the homeopathic remedy does not directly treat a symptom or condition. Instead, it simply helps to initiate the process by which a person heals her or himself.

*Totality of symptoms.* The homeopath views a person's health as a condition of the entire individual rather than in terms of the presence or absence of isolated symptoms. Homeopaths do not diagnose disease or treat diseases. Remedies are selected which best correspond to the person's total state. Evaluation of the individual's level of health and choice of correct remedy does depend in part on a thorough understanding of all symptoms. But in addition, important indicators of general health, like the level of vitality the person experiences and his or her emotional well-being, demand close attention.

*Law of similars.* A remedy is chosen which is capable of causing, in a healthy person, symptoms similar to those of the sick person. The symptoms the sick person experiences are thus the most important guide to the choice of the correct remedy.

*Remedies.* Homeopathic remedies are usually made from plants, simple minerals and anything on our earth. These substances are prepared by a process of repeated dilution and shaking which makes them capable of stimulating the healing process. A stronger remedy is more dilute and potentized (shaken). This is a major difference from allopathic, herbal medicine where stronger means more substance is present.

*Minimum dose:* As little remedy as possible is employed. After a dose is given, the individual's response is carefully observed, and the remedy changed only when necessary.

*Scope of Homeopathy.* Since homeopathy is used to assist people rather than treat illness, anyone, whatever their diagnosis, can benefit from homeopathic care. Homeopathy helps by increasing the individual's strength and resistance to disease. Homeopathy does not cure disease, nor is it a substitute for good health habits. In the long run, health depends in good measure on eating well, exercising adequately, getting enough rest, dealing effectively with stress, and living creatively.

*Acute illness.* Homeopathic care is often effective during acute illness. Again, the remedies are not directed toward removing symptoms or killing germs, but rather toward strengthening the person so that his or her own healing capacities work better.

## The Homeopathic Consultation

Essential to effective homeopathic care is the information you provide to your practitioner. The homeopathic interview involves extensive questioning that may cover unfamiliar ground for those of you who are used to a few quick questions from a time limited doctor appointment. To better prepare you for the consultation, the kinds of information most helpful to a homeopath are described below.

*Reason for visit.* You will be asked to state, in your own way, the conditions that have brought you into seek homeopathic care. You will be asked to describe them as fully as possible. Your description should include everything that is truly characteristic of your problems. Precise details are best but only if you can be definite about them. If applicable, your account should include but not be limited to:

- ❖ **Location** of the complaint as precisely as possible. “*Pain in the left temple*” is more helpful than simply “*headache*”.
- ❖ **Character of sensation of pain or discomfort.** Describe the nature of the sensation in your own words. Is it tingling, burning, numbness, crawling or itching? Is the pain cutting, dull, aching or cramping? These are a few of the many descriptions.
- ❖ **Factors which make the feeling better or worse.** Often the most crucial information to the homeopath concerns what makes your complaint better or worse. Does your condition vary with the time of day or night or season of the year? Is it affected by your position (sitting, standing, lying, etc.) or activity (motion of any body part, walking, vigorous exercise, rest, etc.)? How do temperature, weather, eating, and sleeping affect your condition? Anything that clearly influences the intensity or pattern of your symptoms should be reported.
- ❖ **Concomitants.** Anything that regularly occurs in association with your symptoms should be mentioned. Are you always nauseated with your headache? Does your skin clear up when you get your period?
- ❖ **Onset of symptoms.** Do you associate the onset of your condition with an emotional upset, prolonged or pronounced stress, lack of sleep, exposure to weather, an injury, drug use, surgery, or any other factors?
- ❖ **General information.** In addition to information about your local symptoms, the homeopath needs to know a lot about you in general. Essentially the homeopath wants to know how vital and energetic you feel on the whole, and how your sense of well being (not any particular symptom) changes as a result of environmental or emotional factors. How are you affected, in general, by temperature, weather, time of day, activity level, eating and sleeping? What makes you feel better or worse? Remember, this may be very different from what makes your particular symptoms better or worse.

Diet is also important. Be ready to describe the kinds and approximate amounts of food you usually eat. In addition, you'll be asked to list the foods you crave or have a strong preference for (even those foods you don't think are good for you) and foods that you strongly dislike.

Understanding your sexuality can be an important part of your health awareness, and the homeopath will ask you to describe the usual level of sexual energy that you feel. You are welcome to discuss your sexuality as fully or as little as you feel comfortable doing.

Finally, the homeopath will want you to discuss your mental/emotional nature. What are the most characteristic emotional patterns you experience? During what activities or in which situations do you feel most happy? What emotional patterns most limit your ability to fully express yourself or reach your full potential? How expressive of emotional states are you, and in what ways do you express them? What about your memory, clarity of thought, and so on?

## Remedies

Based mainly on the information you provide, a remedy will be recommended that fits you best in a total way.

*Taking the remedy.* A dose consists of 8-10 of the tiny granules or 3-5 of the larger pea size globules or tablets. Be sure to avoid strong odors or direct sunlight when you pour out the dose. Pour the globules into the cap\* of the vial and then onto or under your tongue. Do **not** take water with your remedy. There should be no strong taste in your mouth; *allow 15 minutes before or one hour after meals* or the use of any strongly flavored substance, such as toothpaste, tobacco, menthol, mouthwash, alcohol, or herb teas. If a liquid remedy is recommended to you, you will be given specific instructions to how to take it. [\*The remedies contain the energy of the substance from which they are made. This is why they are best not put into hand and then into your mouth. You have different energies on your hand from whatever you last touched. Therefore the cap should be used.]

*Action of the remedy.* Each individual experiences the reaction to the remedy in a different way. Usually the effects are gentle and gradual, though at times more rapid or dramatic changes occur. Since the remedies work to better your general health, you should not be concerned if specific symptoms do not change right away.

Intensification of symptoms or recurrences of previously experienced symptoms sometime occur. These are not side effects of the remedy but an indication that the body is responding to the remedy stimulus. *If any reaction occurs that concerns you, don't hesitate to call.*

*Repetition of the dose.* The most important rule regarding how often to take this remedy is this: the remedy should not be repeated until after the healing reaction it has started is over. As long as any changes continue, and especially if improvement is taking place, you must wait to take more remedy.

People with long standing problems are given one or a very few doses at the outset of treatment. Experience has shown that if the remedy is well chosen, this is sufficient to cause a healing response in the body which normally lasts at least one month. Therefore in accordance with the above principles, follow up visits are usually scheduled at 6-8 week intervals. In order to make the correct decision about repetition or change of the remedy, a full review of any changes that have happened is necessary.

People improve over widely varying periods of times. Even though general health is improving, particular symptoms may not resolve for many months in some cases. As a very general rule of thumb, every year of symptoms needs one month of treatment, though some folks find relief in a single dose and others take this time.

*Antidotes.* Certain substances seem to interfere with or reverse the action of homeopathic remedies. Camphor, coffee, tea tree oil, and most standard medications and strong herbs may cause this "antidoting" effect. If you use any of these substances or recreational drugs, discuss their continued use with your practitioner. Dental work, taking mineral baths or acupuncture (especially within 24 hours of treatment) can also sometimes cause antidoting. So please mention these plans to your practitioner so that accommodations may be made.

- **Camphor** is found in products such as chapstick, Tiger Balm, Vick's products, Ben Gay, Mentholatum, Campho-Phenique, room sprays, Calamine lotion, Noxema, and other cosmetics and medicines. You may wish to check the labels of anything you routinely use.

## Storage and Handling of Remedies

Store remedies:

- In a cool dark place.
- Away from strong smelling medicines or lotions, especially camphor.

Preparing the dose:

- Do not have more than one vial or package of remedy open at one time.
- Do not expose remedies to each other or to strong smells of smoke, cooking, moth balls, perfumes, etc. or sunlight or radiation.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Frequently Asked Questions About Homeopathy

### What is homeopathy?

**A:** Homeopathy is a 200 year-old system of healing that uses remedies made from natural substances to stimulate the self-healing mechanism, based on the principle of “like helps like.”

### What kind of conditions can homeopathy help?

**A:** Homeopathy can help almost every condition, be it mental, physical or emotional, because it makes the person healthier overall, giving your system energy to heal itself.

### What conditions can't it help?

**A:** Homeopathy can't strengthen the system to heal itself of genetic problems, like Down's Syndrome, or structural problems like curvature of the spine. Also, homeopathy can't help people who are continually exposing themselves to the very things that make them sick. For example, it won't change a smoker's cough in a smoker, headaches from birth control pills, or depression from being in an emotionally hurtful situation.

### What can I expect after taking the remedy?

**A:** If it is the correct remedy for you, you will gradually get healthier. Occasionally there is a flare up of the symptoms in the first week after you take your remedy. This will not be extreme or long lasting and is nothing to be frightened of. It is actually a good sign that the remedy is working. After the first week you will start gradually improving.

### How long will it take me to get well?

**A:** This is usually proportionate to how long you have had the problem or condition, and how severe it is. It takes your body a few years to heal a problem it has had for many years. You will have ups and downs during that time, but should feel steady, gradual improvement. If a person has taken potent drugs or had serious operations in the past this frequently may slow down your healing process. If you have a health problem that runs in your family you may need periodic homeopathic care during your life to keep it under control.

### What if I get a rash or discharge after taking the remedy?

**A:** It is important for you to know that if you have, in the past, eliminated a discharge from any opening in your body unnaturally with drugs or inappropriate herbals or homeopathy, it may return for a while as you improve under good homeopathic care. The same thing may happen with an old skin rash or warts. You may even feel old emotions return briefly! Call if these things occur, before trying drugs or other supplements to stop them.

 **What will interfere with the success of my remedy?**

**A:** In order for a remedy to work we ask you not to drink coffee, regular or decaffeinated, or use products with camphor such as Ben-Gay, Vick's, Carmex, Noxema, Tiger Balm or moth balls. You should avoid regular use of cortisone, antibiotics and oral contraceptives if at all possible. Make sure to inform your homeopath if you use any medications or if you are in need of dental work. Also, avoid using electric blankets and avoid bathing in natural hot springs. This is most crucial when you are taking the remedy.

 **How do I handle remedies?**

**A:** *Pellet remedies:* Never touch the globules with your hands, as they have no protective coating. Instead, tip them from the cap onto or under your tongue. Make sure not to touch your tongue to the cap. Your mouth should be free of odors when you take your remedy, so be sure to wait one hour after eating or brushing your teeth to take it. If directed to take your remedy in the morning do so before putting anything else in your mouth. After taking the remedy wait another 15 minutes to eat or drink.

*Liquid remedies:* Please refer to your medication sheet.

**Please, do not open the vial or take the remedy in direct sunlight.**

 **How many globules should I take?**

**A:** Take three to five of the larger globules or 8-10 of the smaller globules. Because of the way homeopathic remedies stimulate healing, it is not critical whether you take 2 or 10. We ask you to take the amount directed to ensure you get an adequate amount of the remedy.

 **How do I store my remedy?**

**A:** Keep the bottle out of the sun and away from heat over 100 degrees F. You don't need to refrigerate it, just keep it in a dark place. Make sure not to open the bottle if you can smell strong odors in the room. Remember not to store the remedies next to anything giving off radiation (microwave ovens) or strong odor-perfumes, camphor products or cooking spices.

 **Can I take a remedy while I am pregnant?**

**A:** Yes, homeopathy can make your pregnancy go more smoothly and help your baby be as healthy as possible. Be sure to inform your homeopath if you are pregnant.

 **Where can I buy homeopathic remedies?**

**A:** Homeopathic remedies are made at special FDA regulated and approved homeopathic pharmacies according to a very high standard of purity. There are no homeopathic pharmacies in Minnesota. Certain health food stores and food co-ops carry remedies. We have a list of those places in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area; please ask if you would like a copy.

 **How is homeopathy different from herbal medicines or prescription drugs?**

**A:** Homeopathic remedies are given to stimulate the whole body to heal itself, while herbs and regular medicines and drugs are given to take away specific symptoms generally from specific parts of the body. Remedies are prepared in a special way-and are stronger as they are more dilute. This is also different from herbs and medicines or drugs.

 **What does potency mean?**

**A:** Potency refers to the relative strength of a remedy, drug, herb or supplement.

 **How do I know if the remedy is working?**

**A:** You will start to experience improvement in energy and well being.

 **What is an aggravation?**

**A:** An aggravation is temporary increase in your symptoms. This may occur as your system is strengthened by the remedy. As your system gets stronger, it is able to bring symptoms to the surface, and then move them out of the body. You may experience them as being intensified when they are on the surface. This generally lasts a short time---15 minutes to 48 hours.