

Homeopathy: The Gentle Mind-Body Medicine

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“I feel numb. I don’t feel depressed any more, but I don’t feel much of anything else either” is a common observation from my patients who are seeking an alternative to conventional antidepressants and other psych meds. In recent years *Listening to Prozac* (the book promoting Prozac as a near-miracle drug) has been yielding to *Talking Back to Prozac* (detailing its problematic side effects), leading many patients to seek a natural alternative. While St. John’s wort and other herbs work well for some, they may not work for others, or they may cause interactions with other medications.

Frequently confused with herbal medicine, homeopathy is quite distinct in its healing action, since it has no drug interactions with conventional medicine. Its dosages can be carefully controlled for the sensitive patient, making it an ideal system for hypersensitives who tend to overreact to herbs and supplements as well as to prescription drugs. Perhaps the best way to understand its effectiveness in mental/emotional conditions is to hear the stories of several of my patients. To protect their confidentiality, each portrait is a composite of several patients, however all quotes are authentic.

Postpartum depression

Sally G. is a 36-year-old woman who came to see me recently complaining of postpartum depression. “You’d think I’d be happy, we’ve wanted a baby for so long. But I feel so exhausted and dragged down that I cry at the drop of a hat, and I’m cranky with my poor husband. I can’t believe I would ever dream of hurting my beautiful baby, but sometimes when he won’t stop crying I catch myself thinking of hitting him, and it frightens me.” While her depression was her primary concern, she had minor physical complaints including hair loss, hemorrhoids and varicose veins, all since the pregnancy. When I inquired about other hormonal symptoms, she mentioned PMS symptoms prior to the pregnancy which included breast swelling as well as a milder version of the easy weeping and irritability which she now suffered from. She typically suffered from extreme tiredness on the first day of her period, as well as lower back pain and a dragging down sensation in her uterus. As for her pregnancy, she said, “I ate pickles by the gallon and sauerkraut by the bucketful.”

I suggested she try *Sepia*, perhaps the most effective women’s hormone-balancer among the homeopathic remedies as well as the most effective energetic support for exhausted women. Homeopaths have found *Sepia* effective for PMS, menstrual cramps, menarche, menopause, morning sickness, and postpartum depression characterized by the same symptoms Sally complained of. In my own practice, perhaps half the women taking *Sepia* have noticed a difference in their mood and energy from the first week. I have used it successfully for a wide variety of women’s hormonal conditions, from teenagers with acne, to women suffering side effects of the birth control pill, to women on an “emotional roller coaster” from fertility treatments, to menopausal depression.

Endogenous depression

Helen E., a 44-year-old business consultant, came in complaining of “depression that just seems to come out of nowhere. It seems unrelated to anything in my life. It feels like I’m wearing a lead vest, like my feet are stuck in concrete. I feel so heavy and lifeless. It’s like I’m spiralling down and down into a black hole from which there’s no escaping.” She had suffered bouts of depression on and off since she was a teenager, when she pushed herself hard to be a top student and was extremely self-critical when she failed to get perfect marks. Her family history included depression on both sides of the family as well as alcoholism and an uncle who had committed suicide. When questioned about suicidal ideation she responded, “I would never actually do it, but sometimes when I’m driving I have this impulse to just

swerve into oncoming traffic.” Her concomitant physical symptoms included headaches and chronic sinusitis.

Aurum, a homeopathic remedy made from the metal gold, was my suggestion for Helen E. Homeopaths use this remedy when the depression seems rooted in a familial energetic pattern, the “destructive/self-destructive” pattern. With a broader view of heredity than conventional medicine’s genetics, homeopaths perceive how families can pass along patterns of physical, mental and emotional conditions. In this pattern, Helen was susceptible to developing alcoholism, substance abuse, self-sabotage or other self-destructive behavior. Depression was simply one manifestation of her family’s pattern, and *Aurum* helped her “take off the lead vest,” as she put it. It also relieved her headaches and sinusitis. In fact an early sign that the remedy was working was a profuse drainage and clearing from her sinuses.

Depression following a grief

Depression stemming from the loss of her mother was the presenting complaint for Michelle G, age 24, who responded to the death of “my best girlfriend” by losing all interest in her former pleasures. Normally a very sociable young woman, she began turning off her phone and refusing to go out with friends. She would call in sick to work and spend hours just lying in bed, lacking the motivation to go out. Plagued by insomnia at night, she would then be exhausted all day. She worried that she was developing chronic fatigue. Lacking an appetite, she sipped on diet Coke all day (“my medicine” she called it). She would drive across town to buy her favorite tart fruit juices by the case, a special blend of green apple-cranberry-kiwi juice. She had few physical complaints aside from bouts of watery diarrhea.

Michelle responded beautifully to the homeopathic remedy *Phosphoric acid*, not coincidentally the substance used to make carbonated drinks. Homeopaths think of it as a remedy that can bring back the “sparkle” or the “bubbles” when a normally fun-loving, sociable person becomes emotionally flat, lifeless, and dull — like a carbonated drink that has gone flat. *Phosphoric acid* is used for depression stemming from grief, often accompanied by sleeplessness at night and sleepiness by day, withdrawal from social contacts, craving for carbonated and sour fruit drinks, and painless watery diarrhea. After six weeks on *Phosphoric acid*, Michelle’s energy was back to normal and she was better able to process the loss of her mother.

Homeopathic remedies do not in any way numb or suppress natural feelings like grief following the death of a loved one. However, they can help a patient like Michelle process her feelings by putting her in touch with an inner core of strength.

Medicine customized to the individual patient

Three different women with depression, three different homeopathic remedies. Why? Homeopathy—a system of highly dilute natural medications—treats the whole person, including the total picture of mental, emotional and physical symptoms to match a remedy to each individual patient. Another dozen women with depression might receive a dozen entirely different remedies. A professional homeopath individualizes the remedy to the person, taking into account the causality, the family and personal medical history, the personality and temperament, and many other factors. Sometimes even food preferences can be a clue as to which of the more than 3000 remedies a patient needs. Individualizing the remedy to the patient is one of the core principles of homeopathy, a system of natural medicine developed in Germany in the early 1800s.

Advantages of homeopathy

Homeopathy offers many advantages in treating mental health conditions. In brief:

- The remedies are non-habit forming; patients do not develop a tolerance for them, in fact they tend to need less and less as time goes on.
- People do not need to take them indefinitely; typically the condition is resolved in several months or several years of treatment, after which time the person no longer needs the remedy.
- The remedies do not cause side effects; in fact a well-chosen remedy typically improves other aspects of the person's health in addition to the chief complaint.
- People typically report deeper sleep, better energy during the day, and improved self-esteem.
- The remedies are extremely inexpensive, typically less than \$5 per week.
- It is impossible to commit suicide even by swallowing several bottles of a remedy.

Conditions which are especially amenable to homeopathy include psychological ones and those with a strong mind-body connection. Homeopathic journals abound with cured cases of depression, anxiety, panic attacks, the trauma from childhood sexual abuse, and so forth. Women's conditions like the mood changes of PMS and menopause have been successfully treated with homeopathy, which provides a more curative response than conventional medications. Patients frequently report not only a cessation of symptoms but also a deeper self-awareness as a result of the homeopathic healing process. In particular they are often able to reflect on the meaning of their illness in their lives, which in itself can have a healing effect.

Children's conditions like separation anxiety, ADHD, ODD and various learning disabilities have also been successfully treated with homeopathy, which can provide parents with a welcome alternative to medications which have been FDA-approved for adults but never tested on children. Parents reluctant to put their child on Ritalin, but who are under pressure from the school system, could be good candidates for referral to a professional homeopath.

Severe mental health conditions requiring in-patient treatment are difficult to treat with homeopathy in the absence of homeopathic mental hospitals such as existed in this country in the first half of the 20th century. (Seven such state hospitals, with a total of over 10,000 beds, were listed in the *1941 Directory of Homeopathic Physicians*. [Winston J, *The Faces of Homeopathy*, 1999]). Conventional mental hospitals, as well as other institutions like nursing homes, often prevent patients from taking (or family members from administering) homeopathic remedies due to a lack of awareness of their safety and FDA-protected status.

Trying homeopathy at home

Experiencing homeopathy first hand is the best way to learn about it. Resources for readers wishing to try it for themselves and their families (see "Resources") include several excellent books by Dana Ullman, such as *Homeopathic Medicine for Children and Infants* and *The Consumer's Guide to Homeopathic Medicines*; and the equally useful and well-written guide by Dr. Judyth Reichenberg-Ullman, *Whole Woman Homeopathy*. The latter has partnered with her husband Dr. Robert Ullman in writing several books documenting homeopathic alternatives to common drugs: *Prozac-Free*, *Ritalin-Free Kids* and *Rage-Free Kids*. While not suitable as guides to self-medication, they present the limitations of conventional pharmaceuticals and the advantages of homeopathic treatment. The recently reprinted *Emotional Healing with Homeopathy* by Peter Chappell is the best overall treatment of the subject and includes many suggestions for self-care with homeopathy.

While chronic conditions (both physical and psychological) need to be treated by a professional homeopath rather than by self-medication, acute conditions can be safely and effectively treated at home. The following suggestions are intended for nurses wishing to experience homeopathy first-hand for conditions appropriate for home care.

Ignatia (made from the St. Ignatius bean) is a common remedy for acute grief, for example when someone receives a phone call about a family member's sudden death. When the person responds by sobbing, sighing and wailing, they are likely to find *Ignatia* calming. It will never numb them or deny them the grief experience. As one of my patients said after taking *Ignatia*, "It allows me to cry without screaming and to grieve without becoming hysterical." A good homeopathic remedy will support the person in processing their grief while being able to think clearly and act calmly.

Some people respond to a sudden grief or shock quite differently, by going numb rather than becoming hysterical. They may feel all the energy drained out of them and may be unable to cry. In this case the remedy *Gelsemium* (yellow jasmine) is more likely to be helpful. While the person needing *Ignatia* is hyperemotional, the one needing *Gelsemium* seems to be lacking emotion (although inwardly traumatized). *Gelsemium* is helpful in general for what homeopaths call "hearing bad news" as well as for viral conditions like the flu when the person complains of being "so tired I feel like a truck ran over me, like I just want to close my eyes and lie down and sleep all day."

A friend asked me for a remedy last summer because he thought he had the flu, with this typical drowsy-droopy-dizzy sensation. Since it was not flu season, I asked him what else was going on; he said he had inadvertently parked illegally in Manhattan, his car had been towed, and he did not have the \$200 in cash to retrieve it. I realized he was suffering from "hearing bad news" rather than the flu. I suggested that he get *Gelsemium* from a nearby health food store, and it brought his energy right back (although not his car!).

Gelsemium can be used for situations where the person feels frightened, including going to the dentist, taking an exam, or public speaking, when the person feels drained of energy, mentally blank, and possibly trembling inside. (It can even be used for animals that seem fearful and tremble when they realize they are about to be taken to the vet!) A patient called me recently for a remedy because she was terrified about having to face her abusive ex-husband in court; she reported feeling weak and shaky, and I suggested *Gelsemium* to help give her strength in facing him.

Another remedy for these situations in which the person feels fearful is *Argentum nitricum*. People needing this remedy will keep asking others "What if?" type questions ("What if this goes wrong? What if that happens?") and may express their anxiety physically with bouts of diarrhea—which tend to compound the anxiety. They may be afraid to go out of the house unless they know exactly where all the bathrooms are along their route. *Aconite* is another useful remedy for fright—in this case for a sudden fright, especially for people who feel they almost died or might have died. For example, someone in a car accident who just escaped death, or people hearing gunfire in a neighborhood prone to driveby shootings, might find their racing heart calmed with a few doses of *Aconite*.

Rescue Remedy is almost a universal remedy for traumas of all kinds, whether physical, mental, or emotional (even financial!). It is a blend of five Bach Flower Remedies, which are dilute flower essences (not technically homeopathic but in the same general family of energy-based medicines). For those who do not feel confident trying the specific homeopathic remedies above, *Rescue Remedy* is ideal to keep on hand for any acute trauma: a fall from a bicycle, the breakup of a relationship, the death of a beloved family pet.

All of the remedies listed here should be easily available in health food stores, some pharmacies, and from several on-line distributors. *Rescue Remedy* comes in a little dropper bottle and is dispensed a few drops at a time under the tongue or into water which is sipped. The rest come in little tubes or bottles filled with sugar pellets. (Children love them, and in my practice many children ask their parents for their homeopathic remedies). Typically they are given three at a time to dissolve in the mouth, repeated two or three times a day until they take effect. Then no further doses are given unless and until the symptoms start to recur.

Homeopathy is safe to try as the first line of treatment in many situations likely to arise in the home. To study homeopathy in depth, Teleosis School of Homeopathy offers the opportunity for professionals wanting to incorporate homeopathy into their practice and for anyone considering homeopathy as a career. For more information, please visit www.teleosischool.org.

Recommended Reading

- Chappell, P. (2003). *Emotional healing with homeopathy*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic.
- Coulter C. *Nature and Human Personality*. Bethesda, MD: Ninth House Publishing.
- Coulter C. (2001). *Homeopathic sketches of children's types*. Bethesda, MD: Ninth House Publishing. A description of children's psychological types.
- Cummings S., Ullman D. (1991). *Everybody's guide to homeopathic medicines*. New York: G.P.Putnam/Jeremy Tarcher Books.
- Gray B. (2001). *Homeopathy: science or myth?* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books. An excellent and readable review of the research on homeopathy.
- Herscu P. (1991). *The homeopathic treatment of children*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books. A description of children's psychological types.
- Reidlinger J., Lennihan B. (2002). Homeopathic medicines. In: *Handbook of nonprescription drugs*. Washington, DC: The American Pharmaceutical Association.
- Ullman D. (1995) *The consumer's guide to homeopathy*. New York: G.P.Putnam/Jeremy Tarcher Books. A good basic self-help book, with additional excellent chapters on research on homeopathy and how it works.
- Ullman D. (1992) *Homeopathic medicine for children and infants*. New York: G.P.Putnam/Jeremy Tarcher Books.
- Ullman R, Reichenberg-Ullman J. (1999) *Prozac-free: homeopathic medicine for depression, anxiety and other mental and emotional problems*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing.
- Ullman R, Reichenberg-Ullman J. (1996) *Ritalin-free kids: homeopathic treatment of ADD and other behavioral and learning problems*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing.
- Ullman R, Reichenberg-Ullman J. (1999) *Rage-free kids: homeopathic medicine for defiant, aggressive and violent children*. Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing.

Internet Resources: www.homeopathic.org www.homeopathic.com
www.holistickids.org www.mcp.edu/altmed www.homeopathyhome.com

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