

Ten Most Frequently Asked Questions on Homeopathic Medicine

Scientific
Information

by Dana Ullman, MPH ©1999

What is Homeopathy Anyway?

Homeopathic medicine is a natural pharmaceutical science that uses various plants, minerals or animals in very small dose to stimulate the sick person's natural defenses. The medicines are individually chosen for their ability to cause, in overdose, the similar symptoms the person is experiencing. "Homoios" in Greek means similar and "pathos" means disease or suffering. Since one's symptoms are actually efforts of the organism to reestablish homeostasis or balance, it is logical to seek a substance that would, in overdose, cause the similar symptoms the person is experiencing. The medicines, thus, go with, rather than against, the person's natural defenses.

In essence, homeopathy is composed of two highly systematic methods: toxicology and casetaking. First, homeopaths find out the specific physical, emotional, and mental symptoms that various substances cause in overdose. Homeopathic texts have more detail on toxicology than any other source. Second, the homeopaths interview their patients in great detail to discover the totality of physical, emotional and mental symptoms the person is experiencing. The homeopath seeks to find a substance that would cause the similar symptoms the person has and then gives it in small, specially prepared dose.

It Seems Illogical to Give Doses of Substances that Cause Symptoms to Those the Sick Person Has in Order to Cure Them...Explain This

Homeopaths, like many modern physiologists, recognize that symptoms represent the best efforts of the organism to adapt to and defend against various stresses or infections. Because the body is not always successful in dealing with every stress or infection, it is important to find a substance in nature that has the capacity to mimic the symptoms the person is experiencing in order to aid the body in its efforts to defend and ultimately, heal itself.

The "law of similars," the basic principle of homeopathy, is even used in some conventional medical therapies, such as immunizations and allergy treatments. These treatments, however, are not pure homeopathy since homeopathic medicines are more individually prescribed, given in smaller doses, and used to treat sick people and to prevent disease.

Homeopaths Use Such Small Doses That They Couldn't Possibly Have any Physiological Effect... How Can You Respond to This?

Although we don't understand precisely how the homeopathic medicines work, there is clear evidence that the medicines are active and can heal. Homeopathy became popular in this country and in Europe during the 1800s because of its success in treating the many infectious diseases that raged during that time, including yellow fever, scarlet fever, cholera, and many others. The death rate in homeopathic hospitals was between one-half to one-eighth of those in conventional medical hospitals. Homeopathic medicines also have been shown to work on infants and on various animals (including dogs, cats, horses and even cows) where it is highly unlikely that they are acting only as a placebo. Homeopaths also find that people who are being treated with homeopathic medicine for a chronic disease sometimes experience a temporary exacerbation in their symptoms as the body's defenses are being stimulated. Homeopaths have found that a "healing crisis" is sometimes necessary to achieve healing. It is highly unlikely that this temporary worsening of symptoms is the result of a placebo response.

There has also been some good scientific research published in medical journals and other scientific publications. The *Lancet* (September 20, 1997) published a review of 89 double-blind or randomized placebo-controlled clinical trials. The authors conclude that the clinical effects of homeopathic medicines are not simply the results of placebo. In fact, they found that

homeopathic medicines had a 2.45 times greater effect than placebo.

The lead author of this review of homeopathic research was the same German professor who reviewed the research on St. Johns wort that got international attention.

Another survey of research published in the *British Medical Journal* (February 9, 1991) indicated that there have been 107 controlled clinical trials, 81 of which showed that the homeopathic medicines had beneficial results.

For more detail about many of these studies, see my book, *The Consumer's Guide to Homeopathy*, (Jerome Tarcher/Putnam, 1996) or Drs. P. Bellavite and A. Signorini's book *Homeopathy: A Frontier in Medical Science* (North Atlantic, 1995).

It is important to know that the small doses used by homeopaths only have an effect when a person has a hypersensitivity to the small doses given. If the wrong medicine is given to a person, nothing happens. If the correct medicine is given, the medicine acts as a catalyst to the person's defenses. In any case, homeopathic medicines do not have side effects.

If the Medicines Are So Effective, Why Isn't Homeopathy More Popular Today?

Actually, homeopathy is quite popular today in many countries in the world. As for homeopathy in the U.S., it was also very popular here. At the turn of the century, 15% of physicians were homeopathic physicians. The AMA was seriously threatened clinically, philosophically, and economically by homeopaths. As distinct from other unorthodox practitioners, homeopaths graduated from respected medical schools. The AMA was so threatened by homeopathy that from 1860 to the early 1900s - conventional physicians would lose their membership in the AMA if they simply consulted with a homeopath. The AMA also applied pressure on various funding sources so that the homeopathic schools had difficulty staying alive. Despite the strong pressure from AMA and the drug

companies, homeopathy has survived and has flourished throughout the world.

Where is Homeopathy Popular?

Homeopathy is particularly popular in France, England, Germany, Greece, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and South Africa. Approximately 40% of the French public have used homeopathic medicines, and 39% of the French physicians have prescribed the medicines. About 20% of German physicians occasionally utilize these natural medicines, and 45% of Dutch physicians consider them effective. According to a survey in the *British Medical Journal* (June 7, 1986), 42% of British physicians surveyed refer patients to homeopathic physicians.

Homeopathy is particularly popular in India where there are over 120 four-year homeopathic medical schools.

Homeopathy is also growing very rapidly in the United States. Market research shows that sales of homeopathic medicines have grown at a rate of 25-50% per year during the past ten years.

Is Homeopathy Legal in the US?

Certainly! Most of its practitioners are conventionally trained medical doctors who have furthered their training with the study of homeopathy. Some of its practitioners are other types of health professionals, including dentists, podiatrists, psychologists, physicians assistants, nurses, naturopaths, chiropractors, and even veterinarians.

There are also some laypeople who have seriously studied homeopathy and are very good practitioners, though the legal issues surrounding their practice remains unclear. Because homeopathic medicines are legally considered "drugs," some authorities assume that anyone who prescribes or recommends them needs to be a physician or have the license to prescribe drugs. However, because the vast majority of homeopathic medicines are considered "over-the-counter drugs" which means that consumers do not need a prescription to purchase them, some authorities assume that one does not need a license to use them. Homeopathic practice by unlicensed individuals may be legal if they practiced under the supervision of a physician, but this physician would subsume all legal responsibilities for patient care.

Are Homeopathic Medicines Safe?

The small doses used in homeopathic medicines make them extremely safe. Of course, it is important to know how to prescribe the medicines. The book I co-authored with Dr. Stephen Cummings, *Everybody's Guide to Homeopathic Medicines* (J.P. Tarcher, new edition-1997) provides the step-by-step information on how to use the medicines and when it is necessary to seek medical care. The homeopathic medicines are officially recognized by the FDA as "over-the-counter drugs" and thus any person can order them without a prescription. Because they are recognized as drugs, their manufacture is regulated by the FDA to assure consumers that they are getting what they ordered.

If a Person is Using Homeopathic Medicines, is it Possible for Them to Use Conventional Drugs at the Same Time?

It is possible to take them together, though the homeopathic medicines often work fast and well enough that the person does not need to take conventional drugs. Some conventional medicines, however, are so strong that they inhibit any action of the homeopathic medicine. In such situations the individual must decide if he or she wishes to use the conventional or homeopathic medicine.

There are Homeopathic Medicines Sold in Health Food Stores that are Supposedly for Specific Diseases. If Homeopathy is Based on Finding a Medicine Individually Suited to the Person, Are These Medicines Really Homeopathic?

These homeopathic medicines found in most health food stores are called "combination medicines" or "formulas," since they have between three to eight different homeopathic medicines mixed together in them. The various manufacturers choose the medicines most commonly prescribed for specific symptoms and assume that one of them will help cure the ailment that the consumer has. These combination medicines are popular in the U.S. and in Europe because they are so easy to prescribe and because they work. Because of this, the homeopathic combination medicines are "user friendly." Also, since these medicines are much safer than conventional drugs, they are generally preferable to a growing number of consumers.

Combination medicines are valuable, but most professional homeopaths have found that the medicine individually chosen for the person tends to work more often and more deeply. Still, if a person does not know how to choose the individual homeopathic medicine or if it isn't readily available, the various homeopathic combination medicines are invaluable. It is, however, generally believed that combination medicines should not be prescribed for chronic or serious acute health problems. Such conditions require the supervision of homeopathic or medical experts.

How Do I Learn More About Homeopathy?

A good source of homeopathic books, tapes, home medicine kits, and software is:

Homeopathic Educational Services
2124B Kittredge Street
Berkeley, California 94704 USA
510-649-0294
Fax 510-649-1955

Website: <http://www.homeopathic.com>
Email: mail@homeopathic.com

Homeopathic Educational Services' website is the most information dense site on the internet with over 100 free articles, plus a full online catalogue of homeopathic books, tapes, medicines, software, and correspondence courses.

Dana Ullman, MPH is "homeopathic.com" and is the founder of Homeopathic Educational Services (Berkeley, California), America's leading resource center for homeopathic books, tapes, medicines, and software. He has authored six books, including *Homeopathy A-Z*, *The Consumer's Guide to Homeopathy*, and *Everybody's Guide to Homeopathic Medicine*. His next book is a humorous health book, entitled *The Steps to Healing: Wisdom from the Sages, the Rosemaries, and the Times* (due out November, 1999), and a follow-up book will be published in April, 2000, entitled *The One Minute (or so) Healer: More Wisdom from the Sages, the Rosemaries, and the Times*.

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