



# Homeopathy

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Literature Education Series On Dietary Supplements

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For those of you who are not familiar with homeopathy, this form of natural medicine may be described as treating symptoms with minute quantities of natural substances that would normally bring on those same symptoms *if taken in significantly larger quantities* (similar in concept to the use of vaccines in conventional medicine). Homeopathy seeks to use the body's own natural self defense healing mechanisms. Critics of homeopathy often claim that there is so little of the natural medicines in the remedies, that any positive results seen must be the results of a "placebo effect." This criticism is unfounded, and the positive results of homeopathy have, in fact, been shown to function independently of the placebo effect.<sup>1</sup>

## **Samuel Hahnemann: The Father of Homeopathy**

In 1790, a classically trained German physician, Samuel Hahnemann, became disenchanted with the accepted medical practices of his day. Popular practices of that time included bloodletting, blistering, vomiting, sweating, purging, and other primitive ways of draining the body of bad fluids and poisons. Hahnemann, besides being a physician, was also a chemist and an author of a book used widely by pharmacists of his day. He was very familiar with a broad range of medicines and methods of preparation. Being an avid experimenter, he spent the next six years testing some common remedies, using himself, his wife, and eleven children as subjects. This testing methodology was to become known as "provings". That is, dosing healthy individuals and studying their reactions.

One of the first medicines Hahnemann investigated was cinchona, a natural source of quinine, used even today to treat malaria. After a personal accidental

ingestion, Hahnemann noticed that the drug caused him intermittent fever, a classic symptom of the disease it was intended to treat. After further study, he found that cinchona in significant doses, taken when well, produced fever, chills, thirst, and a throbbing headache, the symptoms of malaria. From this he speculated that a substance that triggered symptoms of a disease in a healthy individual might alleviate those same symptoms in an ill person. And thus was born "The Law of Similars", the theory of "like cures like".

## **The Law of Similars**

"The Law of Similars" simply stated is a therapeutic method based on the principle that illness can be successfully treated by giving infinitesimal doses of substances which, if given to healthy individuals in larger amounts, will cause symptoms similar to those of the illness being treated. This is the very same operating principle of modern medicine's vaccines and allergy desensitization therapies, namely stimulating the body's own natural self defense healing mechanisms.

Simple examples of like curing like might include *Apis mellifica* (honey bee) which causes pinkish red swelling with an itching and burning sensation in healthy people. In infinitesimal doses, the same venom is used to treat these same symptoms. Other examples include *Belladonna*, used to treat scarlet fever, when poisoning with this substance causes a flushed face, dilated pupils, high fever and dry mouth. Likewise, *Allium cepa*, a preparation from red onion, causes watery eyes (as anyone who has ever cut onions knows). But this substance in a minute dose is used to treat colds and allergies characterized by watery eyes. *Rhus toxicodendron* (poison ivy) is used to treat, among other things, symptoms of poison ivy.

## **Infinitesimal doses**

Hahnemann used infinitesimal doses to spare his patients the side effects of the original substances. He found he could preserve the healing properties of his medicines while eliminating the potential untoward effects through a pharmaceutical procedure he called "potentization". This exact process differs as to whether the active ingredients are soluble, like

in the case of plant material, or insoluble, as in the case of mineral material. However, in either case potentization is a “serial dilution” plus agitation. Here’s how it works:

In the case of plant material, a homeopathic medicine begins with a "mother tincture." If the manufacturing company follows the German Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia, the oldest (still used) and most respected in the world, the process will begin by harvesting a fresh plant. This plant will be processed by chopping, then maceration, a technique involving soaking in alcohol and water to extract the active components, and filtration. The end result is a highly concentrated mixture termed a "mother tincture," which has a rich bio-energetic value.

This liquid is made more potent in a step by step process requiring the addition of alcohol so that the resulting product is 1/10 of the starting material. This is then succussed (shaken, agitated), producing a 1X potency. To make a 2X potency, one part of the 1X is added to nine parts of alcohol and again succussed, and so on for successive potencies. This method of dilution and molecular agitation is thought to increase the effective surface area of the healing substances which in turn stimulates an increase in the self healing power of the organism. Hence, less becomes more.

In the case of substances that are insoluble, like minerals and animal by-products, one part of the original substance is mixed with nine parts of an inert medium, usually lactose. This is then triturated (ground) and tabletized. The first trituration results in a 1X potency and each additional trituration consisting of one part of the previous potency and nine parts lactose produces the next potency (i.e., 2X, 3X, 4X, etc.).

#### **How does it work?**

With such significant dilution, one might ask “If there is so little of the original substance left after serial dilution, and how does the homeopathic remedy actually work?” The answer to that homeopathy does not require a concentration some chemical in the original substance for its medicinal qualities. Rather, homeopathy seems to work on an energetic basis, much the same as certain other types of alternative medicine practices including acupuncture, Reiki and Johrei, Qi gong, and Healing touch.<sup>2</sup>

Another way of explaining homeopathy’s energetic mechanism of action is resonance. In physics, resonance is the tendency of a system to oscillate at maximum amplitude at certain frequencies. An example of resonance occurs in music is string instruments. Strings or parts of strings may resonate at their fundamental or overtone frequencies when

other strings are sounded. For example, an A string at 440 Hz will cause an E string at 330 Hz to resonate, because they share an overtone of 1320 Hz (the third overtone of A and fourth overtone of E).<sup>3</sup> Essentially, this resonance occurs due to similarity.

Homeopathy may work on a biological version of resonance. Homeopathic guru Dana Ullman describes this concept thusly, “In homeopathy a medicine is chosen for its “similarity” to the totality of the person’s symptoms. When this similarity exists, a person has a hypersensitivity to the substance.”<sup>4</sup> Of course this theory of how homeopathy works may or may not be true. The bottom line is that there’s just not enough scientific research at this point to definitively prove or disprove it. Despite the mechanism of action, however, there is proof that homeopathic remedies do actually work.

#### **Proof of effectiveness**

There are different levels of proof regarding homeopathy’s effectiveness. This includes empirical evidence, modern clinical experience and double-blind studies.

Examples of empirical evidence include the use of homeopathic medicine include<sup>5</sup>:

- Animals – Clearly the placebo effect is not at work when a cow’s mastitis is cured using homeopathic remedies. Many other such examples exist of the effectiveness of homeopathy in veterinary medicine.
- Infants – Parents often observe relatively immediate effects with homeopathic remedies with infants teething difficulties. Placebo effect? Doubtful.
- Epidemics – During the 1800s, homeopathic remedies were successful in the treatment of yellow and scarlet fever, cholera and typhoid. Placebo effect? Not likely.

With regard to clinical experience, an audit<sup>6</sup> was conducted of 445 chronically ill patients treated with homeopathic remedies, who had previously experienced failure with conventional medical treatment. The results were that three hundred and four patients (66.8%) derived benefit from homeopathic treatment, and one hundred and forty-eight patients (32.5%) were able to stop or maintain a substantial reduction in their conventional drugs. The 10 most frequent clinical conditions treated were eczema, anxiety, depression, osteoarthritis, asthma, back pain, chronic cough, chronic fatigue, headaches and essential hypertension.

Likewise, double-blind studies have even supported the effective use of homeopathic remedies. Just a few of many possible examples include<sup>7</sup>:

- Mustard gas burns – During World War II homeopathic remedies were able to produce significant improvement in subjects with mustard gas burns compared to placebo.
- Hay fever – Subjects given a homeopathic preparation had six times fewer hay fever symptoms than those given a placebo.
- Rheumatoid arthritis – 86% of subjects given homeopathic remedies experienced some relief of symptoms, compared to only 21% of given a placebo.
- Neuralgic pain – Following tooth extraction, 76% of patients given homeopathic remedies experienced relief of neuralgic pain, compared to 40% of those given a placebo.
- Asthma – Asthmatic patients receiving a homeopathic pollen remedy experienced a statistically significant improvement in symptoms, while those taking the placebo got worse on average.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

Homeopathy works. While the science of how it works may not yet be completely defined, the results of its application are undeniable. Furthermore, homeopathic remedies are safe and there is no risk of interactions with other drugs or dietary supplements. Finally, unlike dietary supplements health claims can be made for homeopathic remedies. For retailers, it's pretty nice to be able to say, "This homeopathic remedy can help treat your arthritis," rather than having to gingerly tread your way around an explanation by talking about "joint support."

### References

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