

Homeopathy: The Ten Most Asked Questions

—By Dana Ullman, M.P.H.

What is homeopathy?

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

Homeopathy is composed of two highly systematic methods: Toxicology and case-taking. 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, homeopaths interview their patients in great detail to discover the totality of physical, emotional and mental symptoms. The homeopath seeks to find a substance that would cause similar symptoms and then gives it in a small, specially prepared dose.

Isn't it illogical to give doses of substances that cause symptoms similar to those the sick person has in order to cure them?

Homeopaths, like many other modern physiologists, recognize that symptoms represent the best efforts of the organism to adapt to a stress and defend itself. The body is not always successful in dealing with a specific stress, and thus 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 deal with stresses and, ultimately, cure itself.

The "law of similars," the basic principal 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.

How can such small doses possibly have any physiological effects?

Although we don't understand 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. Some of this research has been on human beings, some of it has been on animals, and some of it has been on plants. This research concludes that the small doses definitely have an effect when properly prescribed.

If a person believes that homeopathy or another therapy will work, this certainly will help. However, belief is not necessary to receive benefit from homeopathic medicines.

The small doses used by homeopaths only have an effect when a person has a hypersensitivity to the specific medicine given. The homeopath finds the medicine to which the person will be hypersensitive by looking for a substance that has the capacity to cause in overdose the specific symptoms the person is experiencing. If the wrong medicine is given, nothing happens. If the correct medicine is given, the medicine acts as a catalyst to the person's defenses.

If the medicines are so effective, why isn't homeopathy more popular today?

Actually, it is quite popular in many countries. As for homeopathy in the U.S., it has been very popular here. At the turn of the century, 20-25% of physicians in urban areas were homeopathic physicians. The American Medical Association felt seriously threatened clinically, philosophically and economically by homeopaths. As distinct from other unorthodox practitioners, homeopaths graduated from respected medical schools. From 1860 to the early 1900s, a conventional physician would lose membership in the A.M.A. if he simply consulted with a homeopath. The A.M.A. also applied pressure on various funding sources so that the homeopathic schools had difficulty staying alive. Despite the strong pressure from the A.M.A. and the drug companies, homeopathy has survived and has flourished throughout the world.

Where is homeopathy most popular?

Homeopathy is particularly popular in France, England, Germany, Greece, India, Pakistan, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and South Africa. In France, there are approximately 6,000 MDs who practice it regularly. In Germany, over one-third of the medical doctors at least occasionally use homeopathic medicines. In India, there are over 120 four-year homeopathic medical schools. Homeopathy is growing rapidly in most of these countries. An amazing study was published in the *British Medical Journal* in 1983 that found that 80% of a random group of 100 young physicians expressed interest in being trained in either homeopathy, acupuncture or hypnosis.

Is homeopathy legal in the U.S.?

Certainly! Most of its practitioners are conventionally trained medical doctors who have furthered their training with the study of homeopathy. Some practitioners are other types of health professionals, including dentists, podiatrists, psychologists, physicians' assistants, nurses, chiropractors, even veterinarians. There are also some lay people who have seriously studied homeopathy and are very good practitioners. Also, some clergymen practice homeopathy.

The homeopathic medicines are officially recognized by the F.D.A. as "over-the-counter-drugs" and thus any person can order them without a prescription. Because they are recognized as drugs, their manufacture is strictly regulated by the F.D.A. to assure consumers that they are getting what they ordered.

Are homeopathic medicines safe?

The small doses used in homeopathic medicines make them extremely safe. Of course, anything can be taken in overdose, and if you don't know what you are doing, you can create some problems. The book I co-authored, *EVERYBODY'S GUIDE TO HOMEOPATHIC MEDICINES* (J.P. Tarcher, 1984), provides step-by-step information on how to use the medicines and when it is necessary to seek medical care.

If a person is using homeopathic medicines, can they use conventional drugs at the same time?

Generally, one will not need to take conventional drugs if the homeopathic medicine is correct. It is possible to take them together. However, some conventional medicines are so strong that they inhibit any action of the homeopathic medicine. In such situations the individual must decide whether to use conventional or homeopathic medicine.

There are homeopathic medicines available that are supposedly for specific problems. If homeopathy is based on finding a medicine individually suited to the person, are these medicines really homeopathic?

"Combination medicines" have between 3 to 8 different homeopathic medicines mixed together. The various manufacturers choose the medicines most commonly prescribed for a specific illness and assume that one of them will help cure the illness. These combination medicines are popular in the U.S. and in Europe because they sometimes work and because they are so easy to self-prescribe. Since these medicines are much safer than conventional drugs, they are preferable to a growing number of people.

Homeopaths have found that a single medicine, individually chosen for the person, tends to work more often and more deeply. Homeopaths also assert that when two or more medicines are mixed together, it is then unknown what this new mixture causes in over-dose and thus what it cures in small dose. Homeopaths generally encourage people to prescribe for themselves for acute illnesses but strongly discourage attempts

to treat any chronic disease. Such chronic conditions require professional attention and too-frequent use of combinations may sometimes make it more difficult for the homeopath to find the individual medicine.

Where can I learn more about homeopathy?

The best source of homeopathic books, tapes and home medicine kits is:

Homeopathic Educational Services

2124 Kittredge St.

Berkeley, CA 94704

(Free catalog is available. Send self-addressed, stamped envelope.)

Various homeopathic organizations provide training programs and general information:

National Center for Homeopathy

1500 Massachusetts, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20005

International Foundation for Homeopathy

2366 Eastlake Ave. E.

Seattle, WA 98102

Foundation for Homeopathic Education & Research

5916 Chabot Crest

Oakland, CA 94618

Three naturopathic medical schools offer four-year training programs which include detailed study of homeopathy:

National College of Naturopathic Medicine

11231 S.E. Market

Portland, OR 97216

John Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine

1408 N.E. 45th

Seattle, WA 98105

Ontario College of Naturopathic Medicine
43 Benton St.
Kitchener, Ontario N2G3H1
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Dana Ullman, M.P.H. has made significant contributions enabling homeopathic medicine and alternative health care to gain increasing recognition and popularity.

He has written over 30 published articles in a variety of respected publications including, *Western Journal of Medicine*, *Social Policy*, *Journal of Alternative Human Services*, *California Living* (the Sunday supplement magazine to the San Francisco Chronicle and San Francisco Examiner), as well as numerous alternative health care and homeopathic journals and newsletters.

He has co-authored *Everybody's Guide to Homeopathic Medicine* (Tarcher, 1984), edited *Monograph on Homeopathic Research*, and served as publisher of five major texts in homeopathy by other authors. He directs Homeopathic Educational Services, which is the largest distributor of homeopathic books, tapes and medicine kits in the country.

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