

HOMEOPATHIC MEDICINE

Sylvia Flesner, ND

Introduction

Homeopathy is a *nontoxic* form of medicine that was developed approximately 200 years ago by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann. The word homeopathy is derived from two words: *homoios* meaning similars and *pathos* meaning suffering. Homeopathy is a form of medicine that uses highly diluted *pathogens* or other potentially toxic substances as remedies. These remedies provoke healing responses in a person's *immune system*, or provoke other body responses to treat the root causes of illnesses.

The theory behind homeopathy is based on the law of similars. "Like *cures* like." In the 1700's, Peruvian bark (also known as chincona or china) was used to treat malaria. The healing power of Peruvian bark was thought to be due to its bitter taste. Dr. Hahnemann disagreed with this conclusion and experimented on himself. He ingested the bark to evaluate its effects. Eventually, he developed fevers and chills, *symptoms* typical of malaria. Dr. Hahnemann theorized that because the bark produced symptoms similar to malaria, taking a small amount of the bark would stimulate the body to heal itself of malaria.

The law of similars dates back to the time of Hippocrates, but it also has present-day applications. For example, many *vaccines* involve giving a small dose of the *microorganism* that causes a specific disease. This stimulates an immune response against that microorganism thereby protecting the person from the disease.

The theoretical basis of the homeopathic approach is as follows. Symptoms of a disease that result when large doses of a homeopathic drug are given to healthy subjects under controlled conditions (called "provings") will be eliminated when the homeopathic drug is given in extremely small doses to someone who actually has the disease.

Practitioners of homeopathy come from a variety of healthcare disciplines, as well as the lay public. Naturopaths, chiropractors, psychologists, nurses, and even some western doctors practice homeopathy. A homeopath can also be a layperson that has knowledge of homeopathy. Currently, there are no certification or licensure requirements to practice homeopathy. However, because homeopathic remedies are safe and nontoxic when used appropriately, there is virtually no danger in using them.

Principles of Homeopathy

Homeopathy requires that drugs be tested, or proved, in healthy subjects. Proving is necessary because the homeopathic drug can only express itself in its pure form in a healthy person that is unaffected by interactions with a disease process. The quest for knowledge about homeopathic drugs through provings on healthy subjects has yielded a fascinating body of literature. This is particularly true in Europe where homeopathy is a more common form of therapy than in the United States.

One double-blind study that evaluated the effect of a homeopathic remedy on people with the flu found almost twice as many flu sufferers recovered within 48 hours after receiving the homeopathic remedy compared to patients who received *placebos* (inactive pills).¹ In another study, hay fever sufferers experienced six times as much symptom relief after taking a homeopathic remedy compared to those who took placebos.² An evaluation of 89 *clinical trials* of homeopathic remedies was recently conducted by seven health professionals in the United States and Germany.³ They found homeopathic medicines were more than twice as effective as placebos in the evaluated trials.

Symptoms as the Basis for Homeopathic Treatment

One of the biggest differences between the homeopathic medicine and western medicine is in the emphasis on making a diagnosis.

Western medicine groups patients according to the diagnosis they share. Patients who have the same diagnosis generally receive the same or similar treatments, even if there are striking differences in their symptoms. One of the major goals of western treatment is to suppress symptoms. This has resulted in a large market for products that reduce pain, fever, and other common symptoms.

Homeopathic treatment is determined by looking at the whole patient as a unique individual rather than categorizing his or her illness based on symptoms that are similar to those of other patients. According to homeopathic thought, the body's symptoms of illness are an expression of the body trying to heal itself and should not be suppressed. This individual expression of symptoms is of utmost importance in determining homeopathic prescriptions, since the remedy must perfectly match the symptoms. It is like finding the correct key for a specific lock. Homeopathic treatment can begin based on symptoms alone even if an underlying diagnosis has not been made.

For record-keeping purposes and/or to make it easier to discuss a person's ailment, homeopathic practitioners might say that a person is suffering from a certain kind of flu or ulcerative disease. However, such names by themselves do not determine a patient's treatment.

Homeopathic remedies do not eliminate the cause of disease, nor do they cure disease. They do not provide immediate relief of symptoms. Rather, homeopathic remedies help establish balance in the body, and promote its ability to heal itself. In order to treat seriously ill people, the practitioner must effect a profound change at the deepest levels boosting the immune system. Homeopathy intervenes at the level of a person's reactive, self-curative powers, with or without the person's fully conscious cooperation. The goal is to bring about a change in the total functioning of the body. Although homeopathic treatment can be supplemented by other holistic therapies, practitioners believe such a change can be brought about by homeopathic treatment alone.

Homeopathy and Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is a very serious disease. Everyone who has hepatitis C should be under the care of a western doctor (an MD or DO) on a regular basis. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms listed below, you should consult an MD or DO who can provide appropriate testing and treatment as these symptoms may indicate disease progression.

- extreme *fatigue*
- low-*grade* fever
- disinterest in food and queasiness
- heavy, painful, and/or tender liver
- very light-colored stools and very dark-colored urine

Homeopathic Treatments for Symptoms of Liver Disease

Some homeopathic medicines require a prescription while others can be purchased over-the-counter. While homeopathy is ideal for self-treatment of conditions that are generally self-limited such as colds, influenza, and headaches, the treatment of *chronic hepatitis C* is best accomplished by a trained professional.

Aconite is sometimes used to treat the high fever, restlessness, and fearful anguish that can occur in the earliest *stage* of acute liver disease. Belladonna, chelidonium, lycopodium, mercurius, nux vomica, and the herb china may be used to treat shooting pain in the region of the liver.

The herb *china* is also useful for treating symptoms such as sensitivity to pressure in the liver, the tendency to become chilled, and sensitivity to open air. It is also used to treat feelings of heaviness or fullness in the stomach and abdomen, especially after eating.

I use an immune stimulator in my practice to help patients handle viral infections such as hepatitis C more effectively. The stimulator is a combination remedy that includes *Trifolium pratense*, *Echinacea purpurea*, *Asclepias tuberosa*, *Ferrum lodatum*, *Vaccinum*, *Euphrasia off.*, *Thuja occidentalis*, *Camphora*, *Calcarea arsenica*, *Ichthyolum*, *Vaccinotoxinum*, *Morbillinum*, *Variolinum*, *Influenzinum*, *Vincetoxicum*, *Coxsackievirus*, *Encephalitis*, *Calmette-Guerin*, *Cytomegalovirus*, *Viscum mali* (*Iscador*®), and isotonic plasma.

Ensuring the Safety of Homeopathic Remedies

According to federal law, homeopathic remedies are considered drugs. To be considered an official homeopathic medicine, a product must meet the guidelines described in the *Compliance Policy Guide* (CPG) developed by the American Homeopathic Pharmacists Association and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A remedy must have known homeopathic provings and/or known effects that mimic the symptoms, *syndromes*, or conditions for which it is given. It must also meet the manufacturing specifications established by the Homœopathic Pharmacopœia of the United States (HPUS). HPUS is the official compendium of homeopathic medicines recognized by the FDA. The HPUS contains all of the official manufacturing procedures for homeopathic medicines. This includes procedures for dosing, labeling, and administration information for users. Currently, there are over 1,300 official HPUS substances. The HPUS initials on a product label identifies it as a homeopathic medicine, and insures that the legal standards for strength, quality, purity, and packaging have been met for that product.

The standards applied to products seeking HPUS approval are established by the Homœopathic Pharmacopœia Convention of the United States (HPCUS). HPCUS is a nongovernmental, nonprofit, scientific organization. HPCUS members are experts in the fields of medicine, art, biology, chemistry, and *pharmacology* who have appropriate training and demonstrated knowledge, and an interest in homeopathy.

The Role of Diet in Homeopathic Medicine

A good diet that stimulates your immune system is an important companion to homeopathic remedies. Good nutrition can help you obtain and maintain good health. It can also help improve the health of your liver.

The following yeast-free diet was designed to help clean your system, reduce stress on your liver, and maintain good health.

Recommended Foods and Liquids	
Fish, Lamb, Wild Game	preferably organic, not smoked, and without the skin
Poultry	chicken and turkey – preferably organic, not smoked, and without the skin eggs
Dairy Products	butter - preferably brands that are <i>pesticide</i> - and <i>hormone</i> -free such as Horizon® sheep and goat milk, yogurts, and cheeses
Fresh Vegetables	preferably organic, wash thoroughly

Starchy Vegetables	<p>potatoes</p> <p>sweet potatoes</p> <p>yams</p> <p>pumpkin</p> <p>acorn and butternut squash</p>
Fresh Fruits	<p>citrus fruits</p> <p>kiwi</p> <p>melons</p> <p>apples</p> <p>pears</p> <p>peaches</p>
Beverages	<p>unsweetened juices</p> <p>filtered water (not distilled water)</p> <p>soy drinks such as Eden Soy Original®</p> <p>herbal teas such as Take-a-Break®</p> <p>Pero Coffee® is a good, <i>caffeine</i>-free substitute for coffee</p> <p>It is <i>very</i> important to drink at least 8 glasses of water daily.</p>
Foods To Be Eaten in Moderation	
Legumes	<p>pumpkin seeds</p>
<p>Grains</p> <p>Limit white flour and wheat products.</p>	<p>air-popped popcorn</p> <p>muffins</p> <p>biscuits</p> <p>cornbread</p> <p>pancakes (made with soymilk or water and honey)</p> <p>pastas</p> <p>potatoes</p> <p>rice and rice cakes</p> <p>grains (such as couscous, quinoa, millet)</p> <p>grits</p> <p>yeast-free breads made with baking powder and limited white flour</p> <p>tortillas and tortilla chips (not fried)</p>

Condiments	<p>homemade mayonnaise - made without vinegar or sugar</p> <p>guacamole - made without mayonnaise or vinegar; instead of vinegar, use lemon</p> <p>honey, maple syrup, apple butter - all in moderation and in very small quantities</p> <p>nuts and nut butters such as peanut butter and almond butter</p>
------------	--

Some suggested food substitutes include:

- Crispini® crackers for crackers made with yeast
- Eden Soy Original® for animal milk
- Bragg's Liquid Amino® for soy and teriyaki sauces
- Rice Dream® for ice cream
- Jeannie Macaroons® for cookies

After 21 days on the yeast-free diet, the following foods CAN BE ADDED	
Fresh Fruits	strawberries – in moderation
Legumes	<p>lentils</p> <p>lima beans</p> <p>pinto beans</p> <p>split peas</p> <p>black eyed peas</p>
Rice and grains Limit white flour and wheat products.	<p>sourdough rye</p> <p>Essene bread</p>
Condiments	carob
Foods and Liquids To Avoid on This Diet	
Red Meats	<p>beef</p> <p>veal</p> <p>pork</p>

After 21 days on the yeast-free diet, the following foods CAN BE ADDED	
Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> grapes raisins bananas plums all dried fruits glazed with sugar
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mushrooms
Cow Dairy Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> milk milk products: cheese, margarine, yogurt, cottage cheese, ice cream, etc.; butter is acceptable if it is pesticide- and hormone-free
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> breads made with yeast
Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>alcohol</i> - including all beer, wine, hard liquor, or anything fermented caffeinated or decaffeinated coffee tea soft drinks
Specific Condiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ketchup mustard mayonnaise (unless homemade) vinegar (except apple cider vinegar) yeast pickles olives soy, teriyaki, barbecue sauce, and hot sauces such as picante and Tabasco® margarine
Sweeteners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sugar artificial sweeteners such as Sweet-n-Low® and NutraSweet®
Other Food Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no fried foods no chocolate no canned fruits or vegetables no chemicals or preservatives, including MSG

Read all food labels. Many products contain yeast, sugar, vinegar, and/or preservatives that you should eliminate from your diet.

All artificial sweeteners, such as NutraSweet® and Sweet-n-Low® should be permanently eliminated from your diet. Margarine should also be permanently eliminated from your diet.

Antibiotics, birth control pills, prescription drugs, steroids, and *hormones* should be avoided unless you and your doctor believe they are necessary.

Your Environment

Your environment is important to your health. I recommend keeping a clean house to minimize exposure to dust, mites, fungi, and molds. Two molds are particularly dangerous to your health, *Aspergillus penicillium* and *Stachybotrys chartarum*. These molds can deplete the immune system, and attack the liver and lungs. In extreme cases, exposure to these molds can be life-threatening.

Reasons for Using Homeopathic Medicines and Who Might Benefit

Homeopathic medicine can be very effective for treating some of the symptoms of hepatitis C. It can also be effective for some of the side effects from western drug-based treatments. Homeopathic remedies are safe when taken as directed because they are virtually nontoxic. However, hepatitis C is a very serious disease. Homeopathic remedies are best provided under the direction of a trained *complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)* practitioner.

Anecdotal Story of Success Using Homeopathic Medicine

David J. is a 36-year-old husband and father of two. He was overweight and a heavy drinker when he came to me for care of hepatitis C. I started him on the yeast-free diet, liver detoxification, and homeopathic remedies. I advised him to eliminate the use of *alcohol*. He followed all of my instructions. One month after his initial visit, his ALT and AST levels were almost normal. One year later, he experienced a *relapse* when his *liver enzymes* became elevated again. A *liver biopsy* was done and showed normal liver tissue. We decided he needed to resume the yeast-free diet. He also began taking a different group of homeopathic drugs. His liver enzymes returned to and remain at normal levels.

Reasons for Not Using Homeopathic Medicines

Homeopathy does not claim to be able to eliminate the hepatitis C virus (*HCV*). If your primary treatment goal is to eliminate HCV, homeopathic remedies are probably not the right choice for you. Unless they are also MDs or DOs, homeopathic practitioners cannot conduct certain tests such as liver biopsies that are needed to monitor HCV disease progression. Only MDs or DOs can order these tests.

Homeopathic medicine requires a significant commitment from the patient to make necessary lifestyle changes. Many people find they cannot make the commitment and/or required changes if they are drastically different from their current lifestyle.

Anecdotal Story of Failure Using Homeopathic Medicine

Joe S. is a 42-year-old Vietnam veteran. He is married with children and has a stressful job. When he came to see me, he smoked cigarettes, drank moderate amounts of alcohol, and large quantities of coffee daily. Having been recently diagnosed with hepatitis C, he consulted me to see how I could help him. He had elevated liver enzymes, moderate *viral load*, and some *fibrosis* on liver biopsy. I advised him to stop smoking cigarettes,

and to give up alcohol and coffee. I prescribed a yeast-free diet to cleanse his liver. After completing the liver cleansing process, I planned to prescribe some homeopathic remedies to help improve the health of his liver. He was able to make most of the changes I recommended, but did not give up drinking coffee. Rather than put a greater effort into eliminating coffee from his diet, Joe chose to return to many of his previous behaviors. His liver health has not improved.

Summary

Homeopathy has the potential to alleviate the symptoms of hepatitis C and to help the body reestablish internal balance at the deepest levels. When cure is possible, homeopathy may help the body maintain a lasting cure.

If you have hepatitis C, get as much rest as you feel you need and eat a well-balanced, low-fat diet with moderate amounts of *protein*. Try to eat well even if you are not hungry. Avoid eating irritating spices, oily foods, and coffee. You should also avoid unnecessary drugs. You must abstain entirely from drinking alcohol.

Homeopathic medicines are inexpensive and often do not require a prescription. Over-the-counter homeopathic medicines are available in health food stores, pharmacies, grocery stores, and other outlets. Product labels that contain the HPUS initials mean that the products were manufactured according to the guidelines of the Homeopathic Pharmacopœia of the United States.

As with all forms of medicine, no one *modality* is right for everyone all the time. We need to continue to conduct research into the causes and cures of illness, and to use the least toxic and most effective systems of treatment.

References

1. Ferley JP, Zmirou D, D'Adhemar D, Balducci F. A controlled evaluation of a homeopathic preparation in the treatment of influenza-like syndromes. *Br J Clin Pharmacol*. 1989;27(3):329-335.
2. Reilly DT, Taylor MA, McSharry C, Aitchison T. Is homeopathy a placebo response? Controlled trial of homeopathic potency, with pollen in hayfever as model. *Lancet*. 1986;2(8512):881-886.
3. Linde K, Clausius N, Ramirez, et al. Are the clinical effects of homeopathy placebo effects? A meta-analysis of placebo-controlled trials. *Lancet*. 1997;350(9081):834-843.

Other References

Wagner H, Wiesenauer M. *Phytotherapie and Pflanzliche Homöopathika*. Jena, New York: Fischer-Verlag; 1995.
Boericke, W. *Homeopathic Materia Medica with Repertory, 9th Edition*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Boericke and Runyon; 1927.
Clarke, JH. *The Prescriber*. Essex, United Kingdom: The CW Daniel Company; 1987.
Johnson, J. *Homeopathic Family Guide*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Boericke & Hahnemann Publishing House; 1886.