

Homeopathy

The basic principle of homeopathy is 'like cures like'. This means that a substance that would produce certain symptoms in a healthy person can be used to treat a sick person with very similar symptoms. For example, raw onion makes people's eyes water. It can also cause a stinging or runny nose. A homeopathic remedy made from onion, *Allium cepa*, can be used to treat patients who have a complaint like a cold or hay fever along with watering eyes and a stinging or runny nose.

What is homeopathy?

Homeopathic prescriptions are tailored to match the particular symptoms of each individual patient, so if two patients have the same illness, but show different symptoms, they are likely to be treated with different remedies. Homeopathic remedies are given in very diluted doses. They are made from many different things including plants, minerals and some animal products. The remedy usually comes in the form of a white sugar-tablet although it can also be given as a liquid. The tablets have very little taste and are taken by letting them melt under the tongue.

Homeopathy was developed more than two hundred years ago by Samuel Hahnemann, a German doctor, who wanted to find a better, gentler way of treating ill people than was usual at that time. His ideas gradually spread and in Britain homeopathy has been used for over 150 years.

Some homeopaths in the UK are also conventional healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, dentists and pharmacists, although not all of these practise homeopathy within the NHS. There are four NHS homeopathic hospitals in the UK.

What is homeopathy commonly used for?

Homeopathy is most often used to treat chronic conditions such as asthma; eczema; arthritis; fatigue disorders like ME; headache and migraine; menstrual and menopausal problems; irritable bowel syndrome; Crohn's disease; allergies; repeated ear, nose, throat and chest infections or urine infections; depression and anxiety.

Children are more often treated with homeopathy than with other complementary therapies. Homeopaths also treat many patients who feel unwell but whose doctor can not find anything specifically wrong. Patients who have had unpleasant side-effects from drugs, or who cannot take drug treatments, may also choose homeopathic treatment.

A limited range of remedies are available over the counter in many pharmacies and health food shops. Your homeopath or pharmacist can advise you on the use of these remedies to treat first aid problems such as cuts, stings, minor burns, bruises and minor ailments.

What will happen when I see a homeopath?

A consultation usually lasts for between 30 to 45 minutes. The first appointment will probably last longer, as the practitioner will take a detailed medical history and talk to you in depth about your current state of health. The homeopath will also ask about things like your eating and sleeping patterns, your moods, and how you feel at various times of the day. Your answers will help the practitioner decide which remedy to give.

At the end of the consultation the homeopath will normally give you a homeopathic remedy and will tell you when and how to take it. Long-term conditions may require several visits. The homeopath should give you an idea of roughly how long the course of treatment will last and how often they will need to see you.

After taking your remedy you may notice some changes. For instance your symptoms might appear to get worse for a short time. Homeopaths believe this shows that the remedy is taking effect. Sometimes a cold, a rash or some form of discharge may appear as a sign that your system is going through a cleansing stage. At the follow-up consultations, you will be asked to describe any changes that you have noticed in your condition, so you might want to make a note of these as they happen.

What precautions should I take?

Some homeopaths think that particular medical treatments or strong smelling substances, including certain aromatherapy oils or mint toothpaste, can affect homeopathic remedies.