

Homeopathic Question & Answers

What is homeopathy?

First developed in Germany in the late 18th century by physician Samuel Hahnemann, homeopathy is a natural method of treatment that works in harmony with the immune system and triggers or intensifies the body's own healing mechanisms. It focuses on the whole person, considering physical, emotional and mental aspects. It is free from side effects and can be used for both acute and chronic conditions. It is also great for preventative care as it improves a person's resistance to infections and possible illnesses by boosting the immune system and overall health.

The word homeopathy comes from the Greek and means "similar suffering". It is based on the principle of "treating like with like" – a substance that causes symptoms in a healthy person, can be used to treat similar symptoms in a sick person. It is also known to homeopaths as "the law of similars".

For example, a homeopath might prescribe minute amounts of *coffea cruda* (unroasted coffee) for insomnia and *allium cepa* (red onion) for watery eyes caused by allergies. Instead of suppressing the symptoms of an illness, homeopathy actually mimics them for a short time and therefore encourages the body's healing process. It works with rather than against the body's own repair mechanisms.

How are homeopathic remedies prepared?

Homeopathic remedies use materials derived from flora, fauna and minerals, which are prepared by repeatedly diluting the substances. Part of the dilution involves a special method of shaking called "succussion" and medicines which have been prepared this way are called "potentised" medicines.

While the amount of actual substance decreases with each dilution, to the point where the substance can no longer be chemically detected, the curative power of the remedy increases. The substance, while no longer present in a molecular state, has imprinted its "energy pattern" on the remedy.

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But how can it possibly work when the remedy is diluted so much that there is nothing left of the original substance?

Although it is not precisely understood how homeopathic medicines work, there is clear evidence that the medicines are active and can be curative. Homeopaths believe that it is the energy or "vibrational pattern" of the remedy, rather than the chemical content, that stimulates the healing power that exists in all of us.

However, as it cannot be measured or explained scientifically, scientists are quick to dismiss it. Many sceptics claim that homeopathy works simply because people believe it will - the placebo effect - and because homeopathic doctors pay more attention to the patient as a whole and they feel heard and attended to. Homeopathy, though, has also been shown to work on animals and babies, who are obviously unaware of what preparations they are given.

There is a great number of studies that point to the efficacy of homeopathy, the latest being a comprehensive report of the Swiss Government that reviewed a significant body of evidence and determined homeopathy to be both effective and considerably more cost effective than conventional medicine.

What happens when you take a remedy?

The changes may be minimal at first and occasionally some people experience a slight worsening of symptoms. This effect will be brief, though, and is a sign that the body's natural healing energies have started to counteract the illness. After this, the symptoms will subside as you regain your health.

It is important to note that the small doses prescribed by homeopathic doctors 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 will happen, however, if the correct medicine is given, the medicine kick-starts the body's defences and the process of healing starts.

How long does it take to work?

Homeopathic remedies are usually fast acting in acute inflammations and infections such as fever, diarrhoea, motion sickness, vomiting, flu, colds and ear infections.

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Chronic diseases, however, will require a bit more patience as they have existed over a longer period of time and have more complex origins.

In contrast to conventional prescription meds that act promptly but often only suppress the disease symptoms, homeopathic medicines aim to cure both the symptoms and cause of disease by mobilising and reinforcing the body's natural healing abilities. Recovery is gradual as your body adjusts until your health is fully restored.

Is it safe to use?

Homeopathy is safe for everyone, including babies, children, pregnant women and people with serious conditions. In contrast with herbal medicines that can be toxic, homeopathic preparations are diluted to such an extreme degree that all toxicity has been removed and there are no unwanted side effects.

Can I combine homeopathy with conventional medicine?

Absolutely. Both conventional and homeopathic medicine have some great advantages and one should not exclude the other. Both systems are needed and they can mutually help each other. Depending on the type of disease, homeopathy and conventional medicine (allopathy) are complementary. For example, if a patient is seriously ill, he should receive conventional medicine to treat acute reactions immediately. However, homeopathy can assist the body to heal faster. Homeopathy is also very effective in treating chronic diseases.

It is also not necessary to replace your medical doctor with a homeopath. However, you should inform both your doctor and homeopath of medication and treatment, in order for their treatment to be complementary. In most cases when starting homeopathic treatment you remain on your current conventional medicines until your symptoms improve and your doctors can reduce your conventional medicine in a safe way whilst continuing to monitor your progress.

For example: if you suffer from asthma, both conventional and homeopathic will be used. When the patient starts his homeopathy treatment, he continues to take his regular conventional medication; and as the homeopathic treatment starts to kick in, and the asthma symptoms decrease, the dosage of the conventional medicine can be adjusted.

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Can I self-medicate with homeopathy? What would be a good introduction to homeopathy?

There are some excellent prepared homeopathic products available at pharmacies to help with minor health problems such as eye irritation, ear infections and hay-fever for example the Similasan range. These easy-to-use products serve as an excellent introduction to the world of homeopathy for a new patient.

Homeopathy is also invaluable for first aid - homeopathic remedies can be safely used to treat bruises, minor burns, sprains and insect bites.

How do I choose a good homeopath?

Choose a fully qualified and registered homeopath and avoid homeopaths who shun conventional medicine. Homeopathy and conventional medicine can work well together and a good homeopath will always refer you to a medical doctor or specialist, if necessary. It's also worth knowing that there are many medical doctors out there who are qualified homeopaths.