

# INTRODUCTION TO HOMEOPATHY

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Homeopathy is an alternative system of medicine that was founded in the early 19th century by a German physician, Dr. Hahnemann. It had its greatest popularity in the late 19th century here in the United States, when 15% of the doctors in this country were homeopaths. However, with the advent of modern medicine, homeopathy began to look old and stodgy and its popularity took a nose-dive. In Europe today homeopathy is much more popular than in America. Since 1980 homeopathy has seen a resurgence of interest in the United States and homeopathic books can be found in many bookstores and homeopathic physicians in most major cities.

Classical homeopathy rests on three principles: the law of similars, the single medicine, and the minimum dose. The law of similars states that a disease is cured by a medicine that creates symptoms in a healthy person that is similar to those symptoms that the patient is experiencing. Hence an important part of the prescription of a homeopathic medicine is a lengthy interview to determine all the symptoms the patient is experiencing; physical, emotional and mental. The homeopathic physician then determines which medicine best matches the symptoms the patient is experiencing and prescribes it.

The principle of the single remedy states that a single medicine should cover all the symptoms the patient is experiencing: mental, emotional, and physical. A classical homeopath would not prescribe one medicine for a headache and another for an upset stomach, he or she would find a single medicine that covered both symptoms.

The principle of the minimum dose has two parts. First the homeopathic physician only prescribes a small number of doses of the homeopathic medicine and waits to see what effect the medicine has. Second, the medicine is given in an infinitesimal dose. Homeopaths have discovered that the effect of homeopathic medicines is strengthened upon successive dilutions as long as the medicine is violently shaken between each dilution. Medicines are typically used in very high dilutions such as 30C (1 part in  $10^{60}$ ) or 200C (1 part in  $10^{400}$ ).

It is the use of infinitesimal doses that is the most controversial aspect of homeopathy and the reason why most conventional doctors claim it functions only as a placebo. However, a number of controlled studies have been performed which show the effectiveness of homeopathic medicine in treating a number of diseases. The best summary of this research is a study published in the British Medical Journal. The authors of this study are not homeopaths but medical school professors asked by the Dutch government to review the existing research.

- **Clinical Trials of Homoeopathy**, Kleijnen, Jos; Knipschild, Paul; ter Riet, Gerben;
- **British Medical Journal**, Feb 9, 1991 v302 n6772 p316(8).

For an overview of homeopathy and its scientific justification:

- The Consumer's Guide to Homeopathy by Dana Ullman
- Homeopathy: A Frontier in Medical Science by Paolo Bellavite and Andrea Signorini

A question that frequently comes up is what sort of diseases can homeopathy treat and how does it treat them. From a homeopathic perspective, this question is somewhat off base. It suggests that disease can somehow be abstracted and understood apart from the person who is experiencing it.

Homeopathy teaches that disease is a reaction of the whole person attempting to restore health. Symptoms are the by-products of non-total removal of some disturbing factor. A correctly prescribed remedy encourages these symptoms. This aids the individual on many levels to push the disturbance further away. The remedy helped the individual's protective systems rather than suppressing their functions. Because it is a reaction of the whole person, diseases cannot be abstracted and treated apart from the person. For this reason, homeopathy treats all diseases in the same manner: it identifies all the characteristic symptoms of the disease that the person is experiencing and treats with the homeopathic medicine which has been shown to cause these symptoms.

Of course, homeopathy is not uniformly successful in treating all diseases. Since it works by stimulating the body's own defense and repair systems, it cannot be successful in treating those conditions that go beyond the body's capacity for repair. If there are irreversible pathological changes in tissues, or serious injuries or emergency medical conditions that require surgery, homeopathy will not be effective. Also, use of drugs that suppress the symptoms which homeopathy uses to prescribe on, makes finding the proper homeopathic medicine more difficult. Homeopathy is a science and an art, chronic conditions oftentimes will require an experienced homeopath to maximize successful treatment.

Homeopathy can be used by the average person to successfully treat minor illnesses and injuries. A number of books are now available on self-care using homeopathy. They are:

- The Complete Homeopathy Handbook by Miranda Castro
- Everybody's Guide to Homeopathic Medicines by Stephen Cummings and Dana Ullman
- Homeopathic Medicine at Home by Maesimund Panos and Jane Heimlich