

ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES FACT SHEET

Introduction

There are many forms of alternative medicine and one fact sheet cannot cover them all. So we have chosen a selection to whet your appetite.

Homeopathy – A Holistic Approach to Medicine

This is a précis of a talk given by Carole Probert who practises at Alternatives Complementary Health Centre, Milton Keynes.

Background

The principle of homeopathy has been known since the time of Hippocrates, the Greek founder of medicine, around 450BC. More than two thousand years later, the Swiss alchemist Paracelsus employed the same system of healing based on the principle “like cures like”.

Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician, who practised in the late 18th century, is largely responsible for developing the system used today.

What is Homeopathy?

Homeopathy is based on the Law of Similars – Similia Similibus Curentur – Like Cures Like.

This means that disease can be cured by a medicine which, when given to healthy people, produces similar symptoms to the disease.

Homeopathy is a natural system of healing, providing remedies that assist the patient to regain health by stimulating the body's natural forces of recovery. It concentrates on healing the patient, not the disease.

One of the principles of homeopathy is that people vary in their response to an illness according to their basic temperament. It follows, then, that homeopaths do not automatically prescribe a specific remedy for a specific illness. Instead, they try to determine the patient's temperament and responses, and then to prescribe on a more individual basis.

The Remedies

Hahnemann found that by taking small doses of cinchona bark he could produce in himself mild symptoms of malaria. If similar doses were given to people actually suffering from malaria, they were cured. The bark seemed to trigger a reflex in the body which helped it cure itself.

Remedies are tested by giving small amounts of the substance to healthy people until they start to produce symptoms. The symptoms are carefully noted down and then collated to form a drug “picture”.

The remedies need to be prepared carefully. By extreme dilution, the medicine's poisonous side-effects are lost and by succussion (impacting upon a firm surface) its curative properties are enhanced.

Sources of remedies:

- Animal
- Vegetable
- Mineral
- Imponderabilia (e.g. electricity, moonlight)

Consultation

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At a consultation you would discuss your menopausal symptoms and whether you had noticed any patterns or triggers. You would focus on strange and peculiar symptoms e.g. where a hot flush started from and what sort of sensation accompanied it and whether you were generally a cold or a hot person.

Examples of Remedies

Below are two examples of remedies which may be prescribed to help with menopausal symptoms. There are many different remedies available and this list of symptoms is just a short selection.

Sepia (derived from cuttlefish)

This remedy affects the circulation and female hormones. It is usually prescribed for women who are generally 'chilly', and those who are exhausted, yet cannot get to sleep. Other symptoms which would indicate this remedy are: vaginal dryness, loss of libido, erosion of the cervix, bladder and kidney problems, discoloured, unpleasant smelling urine, a 'tired depression', being tearful but not feeling better after a good cry, agoraphobia and panic attacks accompanying hot flushes.

Pulsatilla

This remedy is generally prescribed to women who change rapidly from hot to cold. These women feel 'chilly' but like fresh air and to feel cold and do not like to feel hot. An indication that this remedy is required is night sweats, where the perspiration has a musty odour and the heat travels in waves. Other symptoms include: disturbed sleep, waking up in the night and not being able to go back to sleep, a history of difficult periods, thrush, breast tenderness, having the sensation that a period is just about to start but it doesn't, stress incontinence, being tearful but feeling better after a good cry, craving support.

Further Information

If you are interested in homeopathy, please consult a registered practitioner. The practitioner who gave this talk was happy to prescribe remedies in conjunction with HRT, so you don't necessarily have to come off it. As always, Daisy Network does not recommend any treatments and advises you to consult your GP before undertaking any treatment.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is the use of natural plant essences for healing and relaxation. The essences are extracted and made into essential oils. They are then used in a variety of ways, including massage, inhalation and aromatic baths. If oils are used this way, the vapours are inhaled into the lungs and into the blood stream. If you have a massage or use the oils in a bath, then they also enter the blood stream via the pores in the skin.

The benefits of the different oils depend on their individual properties: some stimulate, some relax. Nearly all the oils work on an emotional, as well as a physical, level.

Aromatherapy is popular as it is relatively inexpensive, something which you can experiment with on your own and it is free from harmful side-effects when practised correctly. How easy is it to put a few drops of lavender oil in a bath before you go to bed to see if it helps you sleep?

When buying aromatherapy products, it is recommended that you buy pure essential oils. These may be more expensive but you only use tiny quantities. Real essential oils are rarely used directly on the skin, as they are far too strong and need diluting in oils or water. Beware of products sold as 'aromatherapy oils' as these are more likely to be cheap vegetable oils with a trace of synthetic perfume – so read the label carefully.

Once you have selected your essence, if you wish to use it for massage you will need to select a suitable 'carrier' oil. Sweet almond oil is the one most commonly used. In 10ml of carrier oil for a massage you would only need to add two to five drops of essential oil.

Words of warning: Never take essential oils internally unless directed to do so by a qualified practitioner. Never use them directly on your skin; the oils must be diluted first. If you know that you have sensitive skin or are concerned that a particular oil may cause some skin irritation, dilute the oil and try it on your hand first

Indian Head Massage

Massage and other forms of holistic therapy have long been considered to be beneficial to menopausal women when used alongside conventional medicine.

Massage, in its simplest form, has an immediate effect in aiding relaxation. Indian Head Massage is a relaxing, upper-body treatment that can be performed anywhere. It is a treatment that originates from India around 4,000 years ago. Traditionally it was part of a barber's treatment.

A treatment usually takes about 30 minutes and covers the neck, shoulders, scalp and face. Various carrier oils can be added to the hair which can improve its condition, help to stimulate growth and restore a flagging energy flow!

Coconut oil is good at reducing inflammation/soreness of the breasts if this problem is caused by fluctuating hormones. It also balances the body.

Some of the other benefits of Indian Head Massage include: the increase of oxygen to stiff joints, an improvement in mobility and improved circulation. It also helps ease insomnia! The mental benefits include improved alertness and concentration! (A problem I had during the early part of my menopause).

Having seen the responses from my clients when training, this is a treatment I would highly recommend and most definitely for all menopausal women!

Constitutional Treatments

Constitutional treatments such as acupuncture and hydrotherapy (hot and cold showers and saunas) are highly recommended for menopausal symptoms. Massage and reflexology can also help balance the body and aid relaxation.

Stress is a major factor. When the ovaries cease functioning, the adrenal glands produce small amounts of female hormones to make up for the loss. Overworked adrenals (the result of stress) may bring about deficiencies of these hormones and produce symptoms. Try to counter stress with relaxation techniques, exercise and relaxing activities like yoga and massage. B vitamins help the nervous system.

My Experiences with Alternative Therapies

Since being prescribed HRT about seven years ago, I have become more concerned about the long-term effects of staying on HRT indefinitely. Also, up until very recently, I have not found a suitable HRT that I have felt happy with. My main side-effects have been migraine headaches and mood swings.

About two years ago I asked my GP if I could have a break from HRT to see if my hormone levels had changed and to find out whether my periods might have returned. He agreed to this as long as it was not for longer than six months. I stopped taking the HRT, but it doesn't take long for all the menopause symptoms to come back again! I stayed off the HRT for about three months and had a blood test done. The results were disheartening, as there was only a very slight change – nothing that indicated any improvement.

As I have a very open mind about 'Alternative Therapies', I decided to seek help from a Homeopathic Therapist. She began by taking my medical history and prescribed a treatment

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that is normally used for hormone re-balancing and assisting with the regulation of your monthly cycle. I took this treatment (staying off HRT) for three months. After this time, my periods had not returned and when I had further blood tests, again there was little change to my hormone levels. I chose to go back on HRT.

After trying many different HRT preparations, I have now settled down on my current one. However, I still suffer from the occasional chronic migraine. I have been seeing an Acupuncturist for this and, although it has not totally cured my headaches, it has certainly made them less severe and the sickness I used to get with them has ceased.

From my personal experience, I would recommend trying alternatives to HRT. Just keep an open mind and don't expect miracles. Please also ensure you see registered practitioners.

I am still keen to try alternative therapies and would love to hear from anyone who has tried anything else.

Sara

Recommended Reading

Natural Solutions to Menopause by Marilyn Glenville, who is one of our patrons, priced £12.99 (£2 P&P non members)

Useful Addresses

<p>The International Federation of Aromatherapists 20A The Mall, Ealing Broadway London W5 2PJ Tel: 020 8567 2243/1923 Fax: 020 8840 9288 E mail: office@ifaroma.org www.ifaroma.org</p>	<p>Homeopathic Medical Association Unit 10A May Avenue Gravesend Kent DA11 8RU Tel: 01474 560336 Fax: 01474 327431 E mail: info@the-hma.org www.the-hma.org</p>
<p>The Society of Homeopaths 11 Brookfield, Duncan Close Moulton Park, Northampton NN3 6WL Tel: 0845 450 6611/01604 817890 Fax: 0845 450 6622 E mail: Info@homeopathy-soh.org www.homeopathy-soh.org</p>	

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