

Homoeopathy and Other Therapies

If you suffer from an illness which goes on and on, for which conventional medicine has no answers, it is likely that you will look for help from the traditional forms of healing. The art of healing is as old as humanity, and all ways of healing have one precept common: To heal is to make whole, and healing means *restoring wholeness*.

The word 'health' comes from the word *hale*, meaning whole, hence the term (w)holistic medicine. Lack of health implies disintegration, loss of balance, disorder of the fine-tuning of mental, spiritual and bodily functions. Symptoms are messages that things are not flowing smoothly within us. Many drugs just suppress these important messages, whereas most non-drug therapies seek to correct the underlying imbalance by helping the body to restore its own wholeness. There is of course a lot of overlap between modern Western medicine and the so-called 'alternative' therapies. The visit to a doctor who also has a gift for healing (which is not given to all, in spite of degrees, diplomas, and modern technology) is in itself therapeutic.

You tell your complete story to someone who is prepared to listen. You receive words of explanation and comfort, and the touch of healing hands through a handshake or examination. You may be given a prescription for a medicine, and you are encouraged to *believe* that it will help you. The patient's belief that something will do good is an important part of any therapy, whether it is a bottle of pills, herbs, acupuncture, or manipulation. This is called the *placebo effect*. It is natural and valid in all forms of healing, whether the healer is a witch-doctor, a famous specialist, a family doctor or a herbalist.

The patient's belief in the possibility of improvement is a significant part of any healing therapy, because of the influence that mental attitude has over bodily recovery. It is known that among people with a serious illness, such as cancer, those who have an optimistic outlook, and a reason for staying alive, tend to do better than those who are pessimists and feel helpless.

M.E. sufferers who get better report a great range of reasons for their recovery. In all survey questionnaires asking 'What things have helped you?', top of the league is *rest*. A variety of other therapies are mentioned, including changing one's diet, homoeopathy, gentle exercise, taking evening primrose oil, painkillers, antidepressants, and treating *Candida*; some people have improved after the laying on of hands in Christian healing. So far, there is no single treatment that cures M.E. and CFS, whether it be a drug, diet, or a complementary therapy.

It cannot be repeated too often that *you need to rest, whatever else you undertake in the search for healing*. The energy expenditure involved in travelling long distances to find a therapist who will cure you may undo the benefits of the treatment.

Homoeopathy

The word 'homoeopathy' comes from two Greek words, *homois* and *pathos*, meaning *similar* and *suffering* respectively.

A homoeopathic remedy is a specially diluted preparation of a substance which, when taken by a healthy person, produces a symptom picture that is similar to that of the patient. Homoeopathy follows the principle of 'like treats like', unlike allopathic, Western medicine, which treats symptoms with substances having opposite effects.

An example of homoeopathic medicine which was actually used as a conventional drug is quinine. This is derived from the bark of a tree, which if taken over some time produces symptoms of shivering, sweating, and fever. A weaker extract of this tree bark is prepared as the drug quinine, and was used to treat malaria.

A homoeopathic remedy is prepared by diluting the medicine many times, in a process of serial dilutions called 'potentization'. In the resulting dilution there may be few or no molecules of the original substance left; however, during the dilution process the mixture is shaken very vigorously at each stage, and it is thought that some biologically active property (perhaps an electrical one?) of the molecules of the original drug is imparted to the resulting potentized remedy, whether the dilution is effected with a liquid or a solid.

The weaker the concentration of a remedy, the more highly potentized it is, and the more powerful it is in its curative effect. This is one of the stumbling blocks for scientifically-minded doctors in accepting homoeopathy. The curative effect seems to be from gentle stimulation of the body to rid itself of whatever is causing the symptoms.

A homoeopathic remedy is selected after a careful history-taking, to establish not only all the patient's symptoms, but other characteristics such as personality, seasonal influence, food habits, and any other factors that influence symptoms. So no one remedy is prescribed for any one symptom; three patients with rheumatism may each require a different remedy, according to the total symptom and character picture of each of them.

Good homoeopathic prescribing requires skill and experience, and it is best to consult a fully-trained practitioner. Homoeopathy is safe: even if the wrong remedy is prescribed, no harm results. However, when treating a chronic condition, it is common to have temporary worsening of symptoms to start with. Some remedies are used to treat symptoms only, and can be bought and self-prescribed for first aid and home use. These are in low potencies, and are very useful for first aid treatment of such things as headache, fever, stomach upsets, etc. For example, Arnica 6c is a remedy for bruising, sprains, and muscle pain due to overuse.

To treat a chronic condition, a higher potency may be used, and fewer doses are taken. The deepest level of homoeopathic treatment for M.E. is given by identifying the infection which is persisting in the body and causing symptoms, then giving a homoeopathic preparation of the original virus that started the illness. This type of remedy is called a *nosode*. Nosodes of chronic infections thought to be the past origins of ill health have been used in homoeopathy for a long time, for example Tuberculinum.

A virus nosode used to treat M.E. may be not the exact virus but may be of its family. It is possible to make a homoeopathic preparation of any infective agent.

There are two difficulties about this homoeopathic approach to M.E. The first is identifying the culprit that needs to be treated. The second is that if the correct nosode is taken, it is likely to induce a temporary revival of all the original symptoms of the infection that triggered off the M.E. syndrome. However, the apparent severe relapse should not last very long, a few days to a few weeks, and should be seen as a good thing, a sign that the correct remedy has been chosen and the body is being stimulated to get rid of the persisting infection.

Some remedies that have been mentioned by various M.E. patients as being helpful include:

- Aconite - for great fear and anxiety, especially at night, for the 'feeling of dying', with pressure on the chest, breathing difficulty, or fluttering heart
- Sepia - for dragging weariness (in women), premenstrual symptoms, and with loss of feeling for loved ones
- Arnica - for aching muscles and joints, or exhaustion from overdoing things
- Bryonia - for arthritic pain, bursting headache, all pains that are better for pressure, and for lack of movement

Polio Nosode

A homoeopathic practitioner has used a nosode from poliovirus to treat some M.E. patients:

I give single doses of increasing potencies at 8-hour intervals (as one single potency causes too severe aggravation). This still gives a bit of a knock for 24 hours, but patients sit up, get moving and feel much better. The Polio is repeated when the muscle weakness starts to come back, which will be less and less frequently.

(Personal communication from Dr B. Boss, Johannesburg)

I know one M.E. patient whose illness dates from becoming ill during a local polio outbreak during 1955 when she was 15 - the same year as the M.E. outbreaks in the Royal Free and Durban hospitals. She has been greatly strengthened by having homoeopathic polio prescribed by the above-quoted practitioner.

For further information and advice about the value of homoeopathy, you are advised to read one of the several excellent books available (one is listed at the end of this chapter), or to consult a qualified practitioner.

Acupuncture

Many people think of acupuncture as being mainly a treatment for pain. This healing art has been used by the Chinese for thousands of years, not only to treat pain but all kinds of illness, and also to maintain health.

A Chinese physician does not diagnose in the same way as his or her Western counterpart would. History and examination are carried out, but with particular attention to the appearance of the patient's face and tongue, and the quality of the pulse at both wrists. The practitioner is looking for signs of an imbalance of body energies, and of how the body functions are disturbed.

There is no such diagnosis as M.E. in Chinese medicine. A patient who presents with complaints of exhaustion, muscle weakness, feeling cold and insomnia would be diagnosed as suffering from deficient *Chi* (energy), and deficiency of Chi in various organs such as the heart, spleen and liver. Another patient may have a slightly different diagnosis, but all M.E. sufferers are basically lacking in body energy; this is reflected in poor function of the organs, cold, and stagnation of Chi in energy pathways, leading to pain, poor digestion and absorption of food, or disturbed mental function.

Chinese medicine pays attention to the lifestyle of the patient, and advises on changing it where appropriate. M.E. and CFS would be regarded as conditions where the patient had depleted his or her energy and had no defence against bodily invasion of a pathogenic factor, which would not be expelled but would go deep into the body and upset the workings of vital organs. Substitute 'virus' for 'pathogenic factor' and you have a good account of the development of M.E.

Acupuncture treatment for M.E. needs to be given in a way that does not drain energy from the patient, but rather supplies energy, or else stimulates the body's immune system. A technique that supplies energy is to use a burning herb (moxa) over acupuncture points, the warmth entering the energy channels and dispersing cold, and invigorating body organs. The smouldering moxa does not burn the skin, it only creates a sensation of heat.

There is no single prescription in Chinese medicine for treating M.E. Each patient is assessed individually, and a diagnosis is formulated which may vary in different systems of Chinese teaching. In China, herbs are used with or without acupuncture.

It is important to consult a fully-trained practitioner, rather than someone who has only done a weekend course, and only knows how to treat pain. An unskilled acupuncturist may make an M.E. patient worse, by giving treatment in a way that results in energy being drained away. For M.E., acupuncture treatment needs to be gentle, and to be given in a way that does *not remove energy*. Most M.E. patients are extremely sensitive, and may have a greater reaction to acupuncture than other people.

The insertion of an acupuncture needle is swift and virtually painless. If the needle is then manipulated there is a sensation which varies from a deep ache to a tingling or a numbness - this indicates that the point has been correctly located and the needle will do its work. Few patients complain of pain from acupuncture therapy, and if any is felt, it is short-lived.

On the whole, acupuncture needling is not appropriate for someone in a severe stage of M.E., nor for patients who are very sensitive with a lot of muscle pain. Moxa (heat) treatment is more acceptable in such cases. Some therapists now use a laser which stimulates the energy point below the skin, instead of needles. All properly trained practitioners are scrupulous about needle sterility, and most now use disposable needles.

Acupuncture can be helpful for insomnia, muscle pain, nervous symptoms and digestive problems in M.E. and CFS.

Massage and Aromatherapy

Many people find massage helpful. If you cannot find a trained therapist locally, or cannot go out for treatment, look for a book which instructs simple massage techniques for a carer to learn. The massage needs to be extremely gentle, especially if the patient is very ill or has a lot of body pain. There is no place for the vigorous pummelling and rubbing traditionally thought of as massage.

Much of the benefit of massage comes from the physical touch of a caring person, just as a mother soothes a child by stroking its head. The emphasis should be on comforting, soothing, and relaxing rather than on trying to massage away muscle pain. The body is so sensitive in M.E. that a much lighter touch is needed than in massage for a fit person.

Aromatherapy is given by a practitioner who is trained in massage and also uses essential oils on the skin for their therapeutic properties. After an initial consultation, an aromatherapist may give you a supply of the oils he or she has used, for you to rub in yourself at home, or to add to the bath. The prescription used will be individual to your needs, based on your symptoms. The oils are pure extracts from various plants which have healing properties, known for centuries. They do not contain colourings or chemicals; minute amounts are absorbed through the skin and fragrance is inhaled to produce beneficial effects.

Essential oils work on one level by relieving stress and anxiety; at a deeper level they can balance body energies and benefit the immune system. Different oils are used for different emotional and physical problems; some have stimulating properties (such as eucalyptus), others are relaxing and sedating (such as sandalwood), others affect functions such as digestion and hormone levels.

Stimulating oils should not be used on people with M. E. Those who have tried aromatherapy have found it very pleasant, and comforting. Benefits include muscle relaxation, less muscle pain, better sleep and less anxiety. If a practitioner can be found who can visit you at home, so much the better.

Bach Flower Remedies

Bach Remedies are made from various different plants, each of which has a specific effect on a disordered emotional state. They are different from herbal preparations, in that they are very dilute pure preparations and work exclusively on the emotions rather than on other bodily symptoms. They are absolutely safe, and if a remedy is chosen which is inappropriate for the emotional state, there is no harmful effect.

The most useful to keep at hand is Bach's Rescue Remedy, which is made from five specific remedies, and can be used in a situation of sudden mental shock or collapse. Another useful remedy is Olive, which helps a fatigued, exhausted mind.

Herbal Medicines

Plants with specific healing properties have been used to prepare medicines, poultices, powders, etc. for a very long time, throughout the world. Some of our modern drugs are derived from plant medicines: for example Digoxin, used for heart failure, is a synthetic form of digitalis, obtained from the leaves of the foxglove.

On the whole, herbal medicines are safer than modern, synthetic drugs, so long as they are taken in the prescribed way. A qualified medical herbalist does five years of training that includes anatomy, physiology, and study of illness (pathology), as well as learning a vast amount about botany and the pharmacology of plants. For first-aid use at home, herbal remedies are available in herbalists, many pharmacists and health food shops; these medicines are all safe if used correctly.

For treatment of chronic ailments and deep-seated symptoms, it is best to consult a qualified herbalist who will take a detailed history, and prescribe a herb, or more usually, a combination of herbs, not just to suppress symptoms but to help correct the cause of illness. Chinese medicine uses herbs as much as acupuncture, and there are many similarities in diagnosis and prescription between Chinese herbal medicine, and herbal medicine as instructed in Western countries.

The property of a plant for healing purposes is not classified as being 'good for cough' (for example), but rather in terms of its functions of heating or cooling, stimulating or sedating, contracting or relaxing of smooth muscle, antiseptic, blood purifying, etc. Some are particularly rich in essential minerals, which may be depleted in disease.

Some of the commonest herbs are found in our gardens and kitchens, such as onion, garlic, parsley, thyme, mint, sage, ginger, and cayenne. Many familiar garden plants have powerful properties, including nettles, dandelions, and marigold.

Many herbal preparations have side-effects *if used incorrectly* or if the wrong part of a plant is used, but the toxic side-effects are rare in comparison with side-effects from synthetic chemical drugs.

There are certain herbs that have anti-viral properties. One of these is *Hydrastis Canadensis* - commonly known as Golden Seal. Another is *Allium sativum* - which is garlic, well known as an anti-infection plant.

Several herbs are being investigated in the USA, and are known to have immune-stimulating properties (they have been used in treatment for HIV/AIDS with some success). These are: *Echinacea*, *Lomatium*, and an extract from Shiitake.

Shiitake is a Chinese medicinal mushroom which has been used for centuries to stimulate the immune system. 'The extract is called LEM, and has been found to increase the number of total white cells, T-cells, and has antiviral properties' (CFIDS Physician's Forum, March 1991). At the time of writing, I do not know if LEM is available in the UK.

Herbal teas are alternatives to tea or coffee. There are a good variety available now. It is helpful to know their different properties - for example, peppermint aids digestion, and chamomile is a natural sedative and suitable for the evening.

Yoga and T'ai Chi are both therapies and exercise. They have been discussed in Chapter 8.

Natural Healing

Healing by the laying on of hands, and through prayer, has been around for a long time. Some people are born with a special gift of healing. They can transmit healing energy to a sick person through their hands, and with the same hands can tell what parts of the body are not functioning properly. Some professional healers use purely physical healing energy, others use a spiritual approach as well as physical. The latter may have had teaching from the National Federation of Spiritual Healing. Most spiritual healers offer their services free, and accept whatever payment the patient wishes and is able to give.

I personally believe that regular prayer by a number of people does bring about healing in the sick person prayed for, even if the recipient does not profess any religious faith. Healing by prayer or by touch cannot be measured scientifically. This is a good thing; we need to accept some 'miracles' in our mechanised, material world. We also need to accept that there are many mysteries in life. Wisdom comes with acceptance of, and belief in, mystery and miracles as well as scientific facts.

Two other natural therapies that are freely available and cost nothing are daylight and fresh air.

Natural Light

Natural daylight and sunshine are extremely important for health because:

- The skin makes vitamin D in daylight
- Full-spectrum light entering the eyes has a direct effect on health
- They give one a psychological boost.
- Various behavioural patterns in animals and plants - such as growth, courtship and breeding, migration, hibernation, sleep and activity, the opening of flowers result from changes in light.

Light exerts a profound effect on plants and all animal life. We humans have largely overcome the lifestyle restrictions once enforced by darkness through the invention of electric light. Oil lamps, candles and gas lamps did not influence our way of life to the extent that electricity has. With electric light, people can stay awake as late as they like, can work all day without daylight, sit up late watching TV, and play football at night. We have lost the habit of sleeping more in winter than in summer, and maybe this is why peoples' energy levels and resistance to infection are depleted in late winter and early spring.

Dr John Ott, an American scientist, studied the effects of different kinds of light on plants, animals and humans in the 1960s and 1970s. In his book *Health and Light* he describes the difference in the health and size of some animals in breeding sheds, where one shed received more reflected light than the other. The animals that had more light were healthier, larger, and had more offspring than those in sheds where light was poor. Other factors - food, temperature, and cage size - were identical. Dr Ott (using a DV-light meter) found decidedly higher levels of ultraviolet light being reflected into the areas where the animals had been doing very well.

Dr Ott, talking of the loss of light from air pollution in cities, says:

... civilized man has cut himself off from more sunlight by living indoors behind walls and glass. Man has developed artificial sources of illumination that have almost no ultraviolet and distort the light spectrum of natural sunlight. More people wear glasses or contact lenses, which cut down ultraviolet light entering the eyes. To what extent is this polluted light environment affecting man's health and well-being?

John Ott also records how he himself suffered badly from arthritis, at a time when he was spending a lot of time inside, making time-sequence movie shots of plants. He accidentally broke his glasses, and spent some days outside in sunlight, being unable to drive or to work without them. To his surprise, his arthritic pains improved dramatically, but worsened if he had to spend time again inside or behind glass. He had previously rested lying in sunlight, wearing sunglasses, with no benefit to the arthritis at all. He found that the pain eased only when he exposed his eyes (without wearing his glasses) to full-spectrum light for several hours a day.

The mechanism whereby exposure to full-spectrum daylight affects mood, health and animal fertility is not fully investigated. The influence of light depends largely on an adequate level of the ultraviolet part of visible light being received in the eyes. There are direct nerve connections between photoreceptive cells in the eye and the pineal gland, which is a small outgrowth of the brain situated behind the hypothalamus, deep within the brain.

The pineal is probably involved in co-ordinating circadian and diurnal rhythms in different organs of the body, doing this by way of the hypothalamus and pituitary gland. It seems to be an active gland, and may secrete hormones into the circulation to affect other parts of the body; so it could influence general health, probably via other hormone-secreting glands.

Many M.E. sufferers deteriorate from November through till the spring. Maybe lack of light is responsible, as well as winter cold and damp, and increased indoor pollution. In tuberculosis sanatoria, in the days before drugs for treating TB came into being, ill patients on long-term rest were put outside on open verandas all the year round, so they could receive the benefits of both fresh air and sunlight.

I am not suggesting that people with M.E., who are frequently light-sensitive, should sit outside and stare at the sun. But it does make sense to get outside each day if you are well enough; in strong sunlight rest in the shade, for there is still plenty of reflected full-spectrum light. Someone virtually bedridden should at least spend some time by a

window; even though glass cuts out some light, it is better than nothing. If you wear glasses, leave them off while sitting or resting outside. Light enters even through closed eyelids. If you cannot get outside much, get a full-spectrum light-bulb, and use it in the room where you spend most of your day. These lamps are supplied by some garden centres (for winter plants) and also by some health shops.

Fresh Air and Oxygen

Unpolluted air is desirable for everyone. Oxygen is essential, but there are many unwanted substances in the air that damage lungs, affect children's brains (especially lead from car exhausts), and make chemically-sensitive people ill. Fortunately the air in most cities in the UK has improved in quality following the Clean Air Act and the introduction of smoke-free zones. But the visible smoke and smog from thousands of coal fires has been replaced by ever-increasing pollution from petrol and diesel fumes, as more and more people use cars instead of their feet or public transport.

Pollution is just as bad *inside* many buildings, because of the increased use of plastic and foam-based furnishings and equipment, air conditioning which may re-circulate dust and germs, sprays and air 'fresheners'.

The oxygen supply of some tissues in M.E. seems to be poor, especially during a relapse. There are several possible reasons for this. The first is the abnormal shape of some red cells and disordered regulation of circulation by the brain control centre that seems to accompany M.E. M.E. also seems to cause some disorder of breathing regulation, especially at night. Tests on M.E. patients in a sleep laboratory have shown that there are periods during sleep when a patient stops breathing for a minute or so - these are called 'apnoea' periods. This may explain the alarming symptom of waking up feeling short of breath, and needing to sit up and take deep breaths.

Preliminary trials of oxygen therapy to M.E. patients have shown some benefit. The procedure is to supply oxygen via a small nasal tube during sleep. For those who are very ill, especially with symptoms of bad circulation or evidence of poor oxygenation of the tissues, it may be possible to have an oxygen supply on loan from the NHS, to use at night; the oxygen is dispensed through a nasal catheter.

It is a good idea, even if house-bound, to do some deep breathing daily beside an open window. Breathing exercises can be learned from relaxation tapes, or from Yoga teaching. In modern centrally-heated double-glazed homes, ventilation is often poor, allowing build-up of moulds and dust. So each room should be properly aired each day by opening a window for a time (see Chapter 15 for more ideas on keeping the air in your home as fresh as possible).

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy may be of benefit to some M.E. sufferers. The treatment involves breathing oxygen under pressure, sitting in a large chamber alongside other patients. This results in an increased oxygen-partial pressure in the blood, with improved delivery of oxygen to all tissues.

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy has been used for some years by people with Multiple Sclerosis. Treatment chambers are available at various ARMS (Action for Research into Multiple Sclerosis) treatment centres around the UK.

In theory it should be helpful for the many symptoms of M.E. that are associated with poor oxygenation of tissues and problems of cell membrane function, such as muscle pains, poor brain function, and low energy levels. It is unlikely to hasten the departure of a persistent virus. It is hoped that more will be learned about this therapy and M.E. in due course.

A doctor attached to ARMS has reported symptomatic improvement in 28 out of 36 patients (diagnosed elsewhere as M.E.) attending a HBO therapy centre (Perrins, 1990).

Meanwhile, *M.E.* sufferers wishing to find out more about hyperbaric oxygen therapy and location of treatment centres should contact.

There are of course many other therapies that have not been mentioned here; this is not because they are unknown or useless. Those described in this chapter have all been helpful to some M.E. sufferers. It appears that homoeopathy has helped more people than the other therapies have, but in the absence of any organised treatment trials, evidence of one treatment being better than another can only be based on anecdotal evidence.

Suggested Further Reading

Homoeopathy: A Family Handbook, (Thorsons, 1992).

Robert Tisserand, *Aromatherapy for Everyone*, (Penguin, 1988). Barbara Griggs, *The Home Herbal*, (Pan, 1986).