

Homeopathy

Homeopathy (or homoeopathy) is a holistic system of medicine. It aims to stimulate a healing response to disease by administering specially prepared substances that mimic the symptoms of disease in healthy people. Homeopathy claims to treat the symptoms of a wide range of illnesses including allergies, asthma, eczema, hay fever, headaches, stress and respiratory infections.

It is important to tell your doctor if you are planning to start any new treatment, including homeopathy.

Helping the body to heal itself

The word 'homeopathy' (also known as homoeopathy) is derived from the Greek words *homoios* meaning 'similar' and *pathos* meaning 'suffering'. Homeopaths treat the person with specially prepared substances that mimic the symptoms of disease in healthy people. Homeopaths believe that this strengthens the ability of the body to heal itself.

Law of similars

The cornerstone of homeopathic philosophy is the 'Law of similars'. This law or principle is based on a long-held belief (by ancient healers like Paracelsus) that substances that produce symptoms in a healthy individual can be used to treat similar symptoms in a sick person. Modern homeopathy was founded in the 18th century by a German physician, Dr Samuel Hahnemann.

An example of this principle is coffee. Coffee can aggravate some people who are sensitive to its stimulating effects. These people may experience increased mental and physical alertness, along with an exaggerated response to stimuli. People who present at a homeopathic clinic with symptoms of insomnia, headache, irritability and an overstimulated nervous system may be prescribed a dose of *Coffea cruda*, which has been prepared according to homeopathic principles. Practitioners believe that this will settle the symptoms of insomnia in these people.

Treating the whole person

Homeopathy aims to treat the whole person, taking into account personality, lifestyle and hereditary factors as well as the history of the disease. Since all people are unique, homeopathic medicines are prescribed to treat individuals. For example, headaches are treated with different medicines according to the person's individual symptoms.

Homeopathy is not a replacement for conventional medical treatment of serious diseases or infections, but aims to help alleviate the symptoms of a wide range of chronic and acute illnesses including:

- Allergies
- Asthma
- Eczema
- Hay fever
- Headaches
- Respiratory infections
- Stress.

Homeopathic medicines are controlled by a government authority

Homeopathic medicines are made from a variety of sources, such as plants, animals and minerals. They are prepared according to strict guidelines set out in international pharmacopoeias and in Australia come under the control of the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

Many homeopathic preparations are exempt from the need to be in the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods and some may be exempt from the TGA goods manufacturing practice (GMP) requirements. Homeopathic medicines are considered safe and free from serious adverse reactions.

Very small doses are used

The preparation of homeopathic medicines consists of repeated dilution and shaking called 'potentisation'. Homeopaths believe this process renders the remedies capable of stimulating the body's natural healing forces. After the 12th dilution, there is no discernible chemical trace of the original substance left in the medicine.

Scientists question how this highly diluted substance could retain a biological effect, but homeopaths believe the preparation retains the qualities of the original substance. Although a precise mechanism for how homeopathy works has not yet been scientifically established, there have been some studies that support the efficacy of homeopathy, while others have not been able to confirm its effectiveness for any specific medical condition.

Treatments and precautions

Homeopathic medicines can be in the form of liquid, granules, powder or tablets. Your practitioner might also advise general lifestyle and dietary changes as part of a treatment plan.

Sometimes symptoms may temporarily get worse before they get better. This 'aggravation' of symptoms can be part of the homeopathic treatment. However, you should tell your homeopath if you have these reactions. Your homeopath may refer you to a doctor or other healthcare practitioner if necessary.

Choose a qualified and registered practitioner

If you want to use homeopathic treatment, you should consult a registered practitioner. In Australia, the Australian Register of Homoeopaths (AROH) is the independent national registration board for professional homeopaths. Practitioners registered with AROH are recognised by all the major health insurance funds for rebates on ancillary benefit tables.

Practitioners are registered according to government-endorsed standards that are outlined in the government's *Health Training Package* (HLT07). This set of standards forms the basis of recognised professional training for homeopaths in Australia.

It is important to note that naturopaths are not homeopaths. Naturopathic training does not meet the government standards for homeopathy, although some naturopaths have undertaken additional studies to meet these requirements.

Tell your doctor or homeopath about your medications

You should tell your doctor if you are planning to start a course of homeopathic treatment for your condition. Never stop taking conventional drugs without the knowledge and approval of your doctor. You must also tell your homeopath what conventional drugs you are taking.

Homeopathic medicines are not vaccines

Immunisation is a medical term and refers to the process by which the body is stimulated to develop resistance to a variety of infections. Vaccines are made from germs and work by stimulating the body to form antibodies (specialised germ-fighting cells) to produce immunity. There is no such thing as a 'homeopathic vaccine'. Homeopathic medicines are not based on specific antibody or germ-fighting cell formation.

Homeopathy recognises a range of options for preventing disease and is often used in conjunction with conventional disease prevention measures such as immunisation. Registered homeopaths encourage their patients to exercise their right to make informed decisions on disease prevention and to seek advice based on balanced information gathered from a broad range of sources.

Where to get help

- Registered homeopathic practitioner
- Australian Homoeopathic Association www.homeopathyoz.org
- Australian Register of Homoeopaths Tel. 1300 360 043
- Your doctor

Things to remember

- Homeopathy is a holistic system of medicine based on the theory of treating 'like with like'.
- Homeopathy claims to stimulate healing responses to diseases by administering substances that mimic the symptoms of those diseases in healthy people.
- Symptoms are interpreted as a sign that the body is fighting against disease.
- Make sure you seek the services of a registered homeopath.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Homoeopathic Association

This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. The information provided was accurate at the time of publication and is not intended to take the place of medical advice. Please seek advice from a qualified health care professional.

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