



Penny Brohn
Cancer Care

Homeopathy



Homeopathy is a well-established and safe complementary therapy when practiced by a qualified therapist. It is offered to people with cancer for relief of the side effects of cancer and its treatments rather than as a cure. Medical research into homeopathy for people with cancer is still in its early stages. There are some promising results for inflammation of the mouth (stomatitis) and for the use of calendula for preventing dermatitis during radiotherapy.

However, there is little evidence to suggest that homeopathy may help relieve menopausal symptoms adversely affected by cancer treatments. There is mixed or too little evidence to draw any other firm conclusions. Penny Brohn Cancer Care offers homeopathy for people with cancer as a safe and potentially beneficial complementary therapy for the symptoms and side effects of cancer and its treatments.

Information on homeopathy

This evidence based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about the services that we offer. If you would like more information on how to access the range of services we provide, please contact the helpline at the end of this information sheet. All services are free and not for profit.

Penny Brohn Cancer Care Opinion

We support this therapy and include it as part of the Bristol Approach <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	We support this therapy, but do not offer it as part of the Bristol Approach <input type="checkbox"/>	We do not support this therapy <input type="checkbox"/>
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Practitioner Perspective:

“Homeopathy is a gentle process that combines elements of the art and the science of healing. It involves both the consultation with the homeopath, and the remedy that you take. Homeopathy helps to stimulate the body’s own healing ability and support lifestyle changes which help with energy care.

People often say afterwards “I feel better in myself”.”

More information: What is homeopathy?

Homeopathy is a safe, gentle and widely-used therapy. It is based on the idea of “treating like with like”. It was developed by the German physician Dr. Samuel Hahnemann who first published his ideas in 1790. He noticed that if a healthy person was given a medicine, the person would develop the symptoms of the disease the medicine was supposed to treat. He concluded that by treating a disease with something that would cause the disease, you could cure it. He gave his theory the name “homeopathy” from the Greek words *homoion* (the same) and *pathos* (disease, suffering).

Hahnemann investigated the properties of different substances through “provings”. He and a group of healthy volunteers took a full dose of the substance of interest and carefully recorded the symptoms it produced. From this he produced the *material medica*, a reference text which lists thousands of compounds matched against symptoms. The substances used include plants such as foxglove and poison ivy, minerals such as silica or sea salt and animal extracts such as snake venom and squid ink.

Hahnemann found that the medicinal properties of his preparations were maintained even at very small doses. He prepared these highly diluted doses with rhythmic shaking and striking to distil the vital healing essence of the preparation. This process is called potentisation. Remedies are given as a tiny white pill, a powder or a water-based liquid.

In 1810 Hahnemann published “The Organon of Rational Medicine”. As his work continued, he revised the Organon with new information resulting in a total of six editions, the final one being published after his death in 1843. Homeopathy was brought to the UK in the 1830’s by Dr F H F Quin. He met and travelled with Hahnemann in Europe, and became one of his key protégés. Homeopathy has maintained a strong following, with Hahnemann’s work being taught and practiced by homeopaths across the world.

Today, homeopathy is practiced both by doctors who have qualified as homeopaths, known as “medical homeopaths”, and by those who have trained exclusively in homeopathy to become professional, or “lay”, homeopaths.

What happens in a homeopathy session?

- In the first session, the homeopath will spend around an hour finding out about your health, past health, the health of immediate family, any likes or dislikes you have, your diet, emotions and mood. They will also make observations about things such as your breathing and complexion.
- From this information the homeopath will select a remedy based on you as a whole, not just your symptoms. Homeopaths use reference texts and careful consideration to decide which remedy is most appropriate for you. For this reason, they may post the remedy to you rather than give it to you on the day.
- You may need to take a remedy for only a few weeks. However, in some cases remedies can be taken for months or even years. During this time you may have shorter appointments with your homeopath less often, to monitor your progress. After time, your homeopath may decide a different remedy would suit you better.

What are the providers' claims?

Homeopathy does not claim to be a cure for cancer, but offers a gentle way of encouraging the body's own ability to heal. It can be used for the side effects of cancer and its treatments. It is also recommended for a wide range of other ailments such as arthritis, asthma, premenstrual syndrome, eczema, allergies and so on.

No one is sure exactly how homeopathy works, and more research is needed. Hahnemann based his work on the scientific understanding of the time that health and disease were mediated through the body's "vital force". He theorised that his potentised remedies could stimulate the vital force to act against the disease, much as immunisation stimulates the immune system.

As scientific understanding grows, new theories about homeopathy are developing. Some homeopaths explain the actions of homeopathy with a new scientific theory that water may have a memory. This theory could explain how homeopathic remedies interact with the body and the vital force. However, there is scientific evidence both for and against it and the debate is ongoing.

What do people who have had homeopathy say about it?

Research studies known as qualitative studies ask people about their experiences. They can tell us what having a therapy was like for the people involved in the study, but can't tell us if a therapy is likely to work for everyone (this is dealt with in the section "What's the evidence?"). We did not find any qualitative studies about homeopathy for people with cancer.

Are there any legal issues?

At present, homeopathy is not regulated by law. Homeopaths who are also healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, dentists and pharmacists, are represented by The Faculty of Homeopathy. The Society of Homeopaths is a register of lay homeopaths. It is in the process of forming an independent regulatory body and single register of lay homeopaths to bring together homeopaths from different schools under a common set of agreed standards. In the meantime, there are several reputable self-regulating organisations that train and certify homeopaths. Please see contact details at



the end of this sheet. All qualified homeopaths will have undergone a minimum of three years study, training and assessment.

What is the evidence?

A recent high quality study looked at research about homeopathy for people with cancer. This study found that there is promising evidence for inflammation of the mouth (stomatitis) and for the use of calendula for preventing dermatitis during radiotherapy. These studies need to be repeated in order to confirm these findings. There is evidence from two studies that homeopathy is not effective for relieving menopausal symptoms brought about by cancer treatment. Evidence for other effects is not reliable and there is not enough evidence to draw any other conclusions. More research is needed. A full list of references used to write this sheet, including the research literature, is available upon request from our helpline.

Is homeopathy safe?

Homeopathy is considered a safe therapy when given by a qualified therapist who is experienced at working with people with cancer. There are very few reports of serious adverse effects of homeopathy.

It has been noticed that, for some people, homeopathic remedies can make less important symptoms worse as more serious symptoms get better. This is known as a "healing reaction" or "homeopathic aggravation" and is a recognised phase of the treatment.

Other sources of information

Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer

Cancer Research UK
Tel: 0808 800 4040
www.cancerresearchuk.org

NHS Direct Tel: 08 45 46 47
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support
Tel: 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.org.uk

Other organisations who offer information on complementary therapies

NHS Evidence
www.evidence.nhs.uk

CAMLIS
www.cam.nhs.uk

National organisations that represent homeopathy

British Homeopathic Association and Faculty of Homeopathy
Tel: 0870 444 3950
www.trusthomeopathy.org

The Society of Homeopaths
Tel: 0845 450 6611
www.homeopathy-soh.org

Contact us:

Helpline **0845 123 23 10** (Weekdays 9.30am to 5.00pm, 24-hour answerphone)

Email: helpline@pennybrohn.org

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Statement

Our information and research is designed to help you make informed choices about the services that we provide. From time to time, for illustrative purposes, we may make reference to commonly available products (such as relaxation CDs and popular self-help books). We do not endorse or advertise the use of any specific product.

Disclaimer:

While we make every effort to use up-to-date and reliable sources, we cannot accept liability for errors in the sources that we use and also cannot guarantee to find all the information relevant to your enquiry or request. All responsibility for interpretation of and action upon that information rests with you. This information and advice is offered on the understanding that if you intend to support your treatment with complementary or alternative approaches then it is advisable to consult your medical team to ensure that they have a complete understanding of your situation and the complementary or alternative approach that you are considering.

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