
Homeopathy

Summary

- Homeopathy is an alternative 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.
 - The effectiveness of homeopathic preparations is disputed within medical science.
 - You should never stop taking conventional drugs without the knowledge and approval of your doctors.
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Homeopathy (or homoeopathy) is a 200-year-old form of alternative medicine that claims to stimulate a healing response and strengthen the body's ability to heal itself. Those who practice it claim that it is a holistic system of medicine based on the theory of treating 'like with like'. It claims to stimulate the body's own healing response to disease, using specially prepared, highly diluted preparations.

Homeopaths say they aim 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.

The effectiveness of homeopathy is yet to be proven by medical science. There is no such thing as a homeopathic vaccine, and homeopathic medicines are not a replacement for conventional medical treatment of serious diseases or infections.

While homeopathic medicines are not considered in themselves harmful, homeopathy can be considered dangerous if a person relies on it as a medical treatment and uses homeopathic medicines as a replacement for conventional medical treatment when dealing with serious diseases or infections.

If you choose to consider homeopathy, you should do some research into its effectiveness. Always seek the services of a registered homeopath and tell your doctor if you are planning to start any new treatment, including homeopathy.

Lack of evidence of effectiveness of homeopathy

The effectiveness of homeopathic preparations is disputed within medical science. Scientists question how a highly diluted substance could retain any biological effect.

In Australia, in 2015, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) released a Statement on Homeopathy based on its own review of available clinical evidence. NHMRC concluded there is no reliable evidence that homeopathy is effective for any health condition.

NHMRC's Statement on Homeopathy indicates that homeopathy should not be used to treat health conditions that are chronic, serious or could become serious. People who choose homeopathy may put their health at risk if they reject or delay treatments for which there is good evidence for safety and effectiveness. People who are considering whether to use homeopathy should first get advice from a registered health practitioner. Those people who choose to use homeopathy should tell their doctor and keep taking any prescribed treatments.

Research conducted by the highly regarded Cochrane reviews (which examine the most rigorously conducted clinical research trials) also has failed to find evidence of the benefit of homeopathy beyond the placebo effect.

Homeopathic medicines are not vaccines

There is no such thing as a 'homeopathic vaccine'. 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.

Homeopathic medicines are not based on specific antibody or germ-fighting cell formation and are not an acceptable alternative to conventional vaccines. The Victorian Department of Health continues to advise parents of their responsibility to have their children immunised in accordance with Australian Government recommendations.

Laws and regulation of homeopathic medicines

Homeopathic medicines are made from a variety of sources, such as plants, animals and minerals. They are prepared according to guidelines set out in international pharmacopoeias. Homeopathic medicines are considered safe and free from serious adverse reactions.

In Australia, all medicines come under the control of the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). However, homeopathic preparations are not usually registered with the TGA and some may be exempt from the TGA good manufacturing practice (GMP) requirements.

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 (non-government) national registration board for professional homeopaths. Practitioners who choose to register with AROH are recognised by all the major health insurance funds for rebates on ancillary benefit tables.

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.

Homeopathy treatment

To determine a treatment plan for a person, a homeopath will consider all of the person's symptoms (physical, mental or emotional) and identify the remedy that is capable of producing in a healthy person, symptoms most 'like' the symptoms the person is suffering from. 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.

Homeopaths indicate that 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 and your doctor if you have reactions. Your homeopath may refer you to a doctor or other healthcare practitioner if necessary.

Preparation of homeopathic medicines

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, but homeopaths believe the preparation retains the qualities of the original substance.

Conventional medicine and homeopathy

All medical treatments, whether conventional medicine or alternative medicine, have the potential to interact with each other.

To make sure you are not doing any harm, 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.
- Tell your homeopath what conventional drugs you are taking.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Registered homeopathic practitioner
- Australian Homoeopathic Association Tel. (02) 9719 2793
- Australian Register of Homoeopaths Tel. 1300 360 043

Things to remember

- Homeopathy is an alternative 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.
- The effectiveness of homeopathic preparations is disputed within medical science.
- You should never stop taking conventional drugs without the knowledge and approval of your doctors.

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