

Faith and perseverance

Alice Stainer tells *Anne Coates* how homeopathy cured her eczema

For as long as she can remember, Alice Stainer suffered from eczema. As a small child she had patches behind her knees and in the folds of her arms but it didn't really impinge much on her life until she was 14 when she suffered a severe flare-up. "It was all over my face and was very painful. It also affected my eyes so much that the GP thought I had conjunctivitis.

"I think it was hormone-related. My GP referred me to a dermatologist who prescribed steroid creams and moisturisers but they didn't really help at all. The doctors assumed that moisturising is a good thing but for me it made the eczema worse. It became hotter and more uncomfortable and itchy so I have to use moisturising creams very carefully."

Alice's eczema didn't respond to orthodox treatment and when she was 15 a friend of the family who believed in holistic treatments, suggested she try homeopathy. The friend had been treated by Dr Roy Welford so Alice made an appointment to see him privately. Dr Welford found an appropriate remedy straightaway.

"He prescribed six powders of Nat mur in increasing potencies to be taken on consecutive days and my eczema got better within a matter of weeks," Alice remembers. "I was then given a booster dose every six months." Alice's family paid for the first consultation then a GP referral meant she received her treatment with Dr Welford on the NHS at the Bristol Homeopathic Hospital.

Back to square one

With her eczema firmly under control Alice was able to continue her studies through her teens and to university.

"The PCT had stopped funding homeopathic treatment after the second year of my degree at Oxford. But I had



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a stock of boosters and wasn't too worried; I didn't think I would need more treatment. How wrong I was! It seems ironic that during the stressful period of my degree, which was very intense both personally and academically, my eczema was fine, even during Finals. That is why I don't believe it is entirely stress-related, although it un-

doubtedly exacerbates it."

Then, at the age of 21, just after she had finished her degree, the homeopathic boosters she had been taking suddenly stopped working. "The eczema started to encroach a lot more on my life. This time it was on my back and I had random flare-ups over my legs that went away on their own accord after several weeks. My condition was a lot more unstable and erratic and then the next bout was one of the worst – the eczema was all over my neck and looked like a red collar!"

At that time, Alice was taking a gap year working in Oxford. She rang Dr Welford and he gave her advice on the phone.

Alice went to Leeds University to study for her MA and then began her PhD on Henry James. From the age of 21 to 24 her eczema was getting worse and was not under control. "I never had total body cover but it was localised in big patches which I just tried to manage as best I could. Sometimes I had a bit of a cry. I wasn't very happy in Leeds and the eczema was impinging more and more on my life."

The following summer when Alice was 24, she had a pub meal of tuna in a sauce and had an anaphylactic reaction. "Within ten minutes I was throwing up. I had to have adrenaline. I discovered afterwards that scombroid fish poisoning (when fish is not kept at the right temperature and huge levels of histamine build up) mimics an allergic reaction.

"I've had tuna since and I've been fine. But after that my eczema got a lot worse and appeared on my forehead where I had never had it before. My skin looked like roof tiles and I couldn't frown. It was really bizarre. I had to vacuum my bed and room daily – it didn't make me feel good about myself – I felt disgusting. By this point I'd been pre-



Photo: istockphoto.com/Geoff Kuhnera

Wolf's milk had a huge impact on Alice's eczema

scribed oral steroids but they made no difference.”

During the autumn term of 2002 she started to lose a lot of weight, she was not sleeping and was trying to hold down two jobs, one in the main university library and one in the English faculty office at the same time as studying. “At one point I had to see an emergency doctor and apologised, saying I probably shouldn't have come but he said, no this is bad! I felt really weird and spaced out because I wasn't sleeping. I didn't feel I was me. Everything was an effort, even brushing my hair and putting on clothes.

“When I went home for Christmas, I just wasn't well enough to go back. My parents thought if I was at home I'd get better. My GPs at home were just not good with eczema and recommended steroids, then moisturiser then clingfilm – it was humiliating being wrapped up by my sister or mother before going to bed and it made my eczema worse. The GP wasn't very sympathetic saying that as the skin is the largest organ I was bound to feel ill! Eczema had taken over my life to such an extent that normal life was just impossible.”

Alice rang Dr Welford again and asked that if he couldn't see her, could he recommend another doctor. In January 2003, she saw Dr Julie Geraghty who suggested that Alice's body had changed so that the Nat mur was no longer working for her. “I had long consultations with Dr Geraghty to get the most from my personal history. It took a while to find the medicine that would work for me. She tried Ignatia first then we had two near successes with Scot's pine (I love Scotland and Scottish dancing) and then Lac suilinum, pig's milk. Both worked for a while then stopped.”

Then in August 2004 there was a major breakthrough when Alice was prescribed Lac lupaninum, wolf's milk. “Initially I had a horrendous aggravation (that's why I defy anyone to say homeopathy is a placebo!). I felt bits of me were falling off. My skin felt like I was rotting, it was so fluid and weeping and I felt I smelled putrid. This lasted about three weeks and I was ringing Dr Geraghty quite often. I think she was shocked at how vicious it was. After that the eczema started to clear a bit. Although when I recently saw a photo of me at that time I looked horrendous!

“Then the improvement was quite dramatic. Dr Geraghty says I have a dynamic system so I heal quickly as well as get worse quickly. The flare-ups stabilised gradually, each one a little less severe than before. These stabilised from the top down, apparently a sign that homeopathy is working. Suddenly I could see patches of normal skin including in my ears which were weeping so much I had to put cotton wool in them to stop it running down face.”

Alice was able to continue her PhD studies which she is completing in Oxford. “Life is so much better now. I'll finish my PhD at Christmas and I have an active social life as well as my singing and Scottish dancing which I had been forced to give up.”

Julie Geraghty comments:

It has been a pleasure to work with Alice over the last three years and I am delighted that homeopathy has helped to improve her eczema significantly and her quality of life. Alice's eczema was exceptionally bad when I first saw her and what has impressed me about her is her loyalty to the homeopathic process even when improvements were slow. She had not had positive experiences with steroid creams or oral steroid treatments, and was also at one point strongly advised by a dermatologist to start the drug Methotrexate, a chemotherapy agent used in severe cases of eczema and other inflammatory conditions. But she managed to keep going until we started the Lac lupaninum, wolf's milk, which helped her the most. She became expert

in balancing her lifestyle in terms of diet, moisturising regime etc during the difficult times.

However I should point out that I do advise patients with bad eczema that they can use steroid creams sparingly in severely affected areas if I have not been able to control the rash successfully with homeopathy. There are, of course, many different remedies one can use; it depends entirely on the particular patient and their experience not only of their eczema, but of their life in general. So it can be quite a process to understand how that particular person views and experiences the world around them, and then to analyse the information in homeopathic terms. Sometimes one does get it right first time, though! Also one remedy can help over a certain time period and then stop working, as in Alice's case with the Nat mur. One then needs to find a deeper acting remedy that fits the whole picture.

I have seen Alice blossoming over the last three years as her eczema improved and she was able to resume work on her PhD. Wolf's milk is a relatively new addition to our homeopathic remedy selection, and is proving itself invaluable in many cases, not only eczema. It has themes in common with the other milk or mammal remedies, like horse's milk (Lac equinum), lion's milk (Lac leoninum), dolphin's milk (Lac delphinum). People who need these remedies all have issues to do with needing their identity to be recognised within the group or family that they are part of. In Lac lupaninum there are more specific issues to do with feeling isolated from and shunned by the group, which causes despair and anger.

Alice felt that her eczema was isolating her and she often used the word “disgusting” when describing her skin during the bad phases. This is an understandable reaction, however not all people with eczema will feel this way, and so we have to note what is most characteristic about the particular patient's feelings about their illness. I was very interested to hear from Alice that she has had a fascination about wolves since childhood!

Julie Geraghty MBChB MFHom DCH is a full time homeopathic physician. She works at Bristol Homeopathic Hospital one day a week and has a private practice in Bristol. She also teaches homeopathy to doctors and other health professionals both in the UK and abroad.