

Asthma

Homeopathy has an important part to play, writes *Mabel Aghadiuno*

Asthma is a very common condition affecting five per cent of the population at one stage of life. In the Western world, up to ten per cent of children have the disease. It is certainly not confined to our epoch – Seneca the younger, a powerful Roman leader and historic figure of the theatre, described his asthma as his “last gasp”. However, he was something of a celebrity during his age and his demise was certainly not due to asthma!

In asthma the bronchial tubes narrow and this makes it more difficult to breathe. Symptoms that occur in asthma are chest tightness, coughing, wheezy breathing and shortness of breath. These symptoms may simply occur when the body has to work harder – such as on walking quickly, going upstairs or running. House dust may provoke an asthma attack if there is a history of allergy as may exposure to cat, dog or horse hair. People who suffer from hay fever may find that they get asthma-like symptoms too. It is helpful to find out if the asthma is caused by an allergy as this can offer some direction that treatment with homeopathy may pursue. Asthma patients may have a personal or family history of hay fever and/or eczema, as these conditions tend to exist together.

Conventional treatment

In terms of conventional

treatment, the medication available can offer reasonable control of symptoms. Bronchodilator inhalers (available on prescription) such as Salbutamol (Ventolin) and Bricanyl (Terbutaline) are designed to act on the muscles of the airways and help the air flow through. You could think of the airways as tunnels, which narrow down when there is asthma. The bronchodilators are the workmen which widen the tunnel allowing greater flow of air (the traffic). There are also steroid inhalers such as Becotide (Beclomethasone) and Pulmicort (Budesonide) which you could imagine to be the workmen who do the maintenance work in the tunnel preventing the build up of debris or do things which keep the tunnel nice and wide – they act by reducing the inflammation. If used well and if the asthma is not severe, inhalers such as Becotide can do a good job. If someone has asthma and they are already on conventional medicine I would strongly recommend that they do not stop their medication or alter it without deciding this together with a doctor. Stopping medication can result in a flaring up of the asthma and this may be confused with a homeopathic aggravation, or worse, it could be potentially very serious.

Nevertheless sometimes

people do not like the thought of taking these drugs and of the side effects that can occur. The side effects of Salbutamol are generally mild and steroids used short term rarely cause problems but the long term use of steroids even if inhaled may lead to potential problems if large doses are used. Initially homeopathic treatment may be used alongside conventional treatment but eventually we wish for a reduction in inhaler use and hopefully we can wean the patient off them provided that homeopathy gives a result as good or better than that obtained with inhalers.

Homeopathic treatment

So what homeopathic medicines are available to treat asthma? Asthma like any other condition can be treated with homeopathy at various levels. The ideal would be to find the treatment, which reflects the Similimum of the case (or as near to the Similimum as possible). By Similimum, I mean the remedy that best matches the person not just in terms of his symptoms but also in terms of his psyche and the way that he relates to other people and to life generally. This would offer a deeper prospect of healing. However finding the Similimum may not always be possible and there are many remedies which

may be given for the symptoms of asthma. There are also remedies that can be given for the causes of allergic asthma (homeopathic preparations of house dust mite, grasses and pollens etc). Asthma is a condition for which I would highly recommend professional treatment – I would not advocate self-treatment. Here are the outlines of a few remedies, which may be helpful in the treatment of asthma.

Blatta orientalis

This is the large dark Oriental cockroach. As a species, cockroaches are night-active insects and most live in damp places. Interestingly, asthma sufferers who benefit from this remedy may complain that their condition is worse in mouldy, damp environments. There may also be an allergy or sensitivity to moulds, mildew and rotting leaves. This group of people comment that exertion and ascending tend to aggravate their symptoms although this can be a general finding in asthma. The combination of obesity and asthma indicates that *Blatta orientalis* is a remedy worth considering.

Ipecacuanha

If asthma is associated with nausea and/or vomiting then *Ipecacuanha* could be indicated. This remedy is obtained from the dried roots of a creeping shrub, *Cephaelis* (or *Psychotria*) *ipecacuanha*, which is native to Brazil but cultivated in other tropical climates. Emetine, the active principle of *Ipecac*, is obtained from the bark or the root. It is a powerful poison that produces vomiting and is sometimes prescribed to

Coney, Joy/Science Photo Library



Homeopathic treatment may lead to a reduction in inhaler use

relieve the stomach of some other poison. Traditionally *Ipecac* is used as an expectorant in the treatment of bronchitis or croup, stimulating bronchial secretions to make coughing easier. In terms of homeopathy *Ipecac* patients present with a constant cough with gagging and vomiting. The chest may rattle and the patient complains that the symptoms are worse in warm humid weather and that heat generally makes her feel worse. She therefore may prefer sitting up by an open window to get some air. The hands and feet are cold and perspire profusely. *Ipecac* is recognised as a remedy for childhood asthmatic crisis. Prompt medical intervention is obviously indicated well before a child reaches this stage of illness.

Lobelia inflata

Lobelia inflata (Indian tobacco) derives from a common American plant, which has small blue flowers and inflated capsules. The “inflation” of the capsules could serve as a symbol of the type of asthma that this remedy helps. Asthma can be

a frightening experience especially when you feel that you are not getting enough air into your lungs. As with many other conditions, this can lead to hysteria and panic. Panic can lead to working unnecessarily hard to breathe and this can result in “over-inflation” of the lungs. With this type of asthma, the shortness of breath is far out of proportion to the wheeze and therefore the amount of narrowing of the airways that there actually is. The patients who need *Lobelia* can feel a sensation of constriction or a lump in the chest. It can also be helpful when an asthma attack occurs during labour. Drafts and cold or damp tend to make the asthma worse while slow deep breathing make it better. Strangely, rapid walking also improves things.

Antimonium tartaricum

This, like *Ipecac*, was used traditionally in medicine as an emetic. It was also used as an expectorant helping the production of catarrh from the chest. It was used in the treatment of several diseases ➤



Despite suffering from asthma, the charismatic John F Kennedy reached the highest office in the USA

Mabel Aghadiuno MBChB MSc MRCGP DGM MFHom has been practising homeopathic medicine for some years, previously at the Glasgow Homoeopathic Hospital and also in Edinburgh. She currently works in the Bromley homeopathic clinic and also treats patients privately.

but because the side-effects were frequent and toxic this eventually limited its use. Fortunately, the doses that are used in homeopathy are infinitesimally small so it can be administered with some benefit. This remedy can be useful in children and in the elderly, especially where the asthma is associated with infection and a lot of mucus. The mucus causes a coarse, wet sounding rattling noise both on breathing in and out. The patient may say that he feels generally better when he is fanned but he also might be rather irritable and wish to be left alone. There are also some other symptoms such as breathlessness, which is worse from heat and lying, but these are not really very specific.

Sambucus nigra

This can be helpful particularly in childhood asthma. The elder is one of the most mysterious plants in British

folk tradition. Traditionally feelings about the elder were ambivalent – some considered it the friend of witches and were extremely superstitious about even bringing the wood into the house. However, the elder was also used for its protective and curative effects – protection against witches, for warding off flies and curing warts. The remedy *Sambucus nigra* is prepared from a tincture of the leaves and flowers. There was a legend that if you fell asleep under elder flowers, the scent would poison you and you would never wake up. Perhaps there is some truth in this if homeopathy will cure what it will cause. The patient who might benefit from *Sambucus* wakes up in the night with a frightening sensation of suffocation and may even have cyanosis (blueness of the face). There can be severe spasms of the respiratory airways so it is very frightening. These patients are worse at midnight or from midnight to 3am. The asthmatic attack may be associated with marked perspiration, especially on waking.

Natrum sulphuricum

This is a very useful remedy for asthma in both children and adults. The asthma may stop at puberty and reappear later from the 30s onwards. The asthma may even appear in association with a period of grief. It tends to be worse at 4am or between 4 and 5am. Damp weather – be it cold or warm – makes it worse, as does fog and storms. It may also be worse before menstruation. At times, there can be rattling and greenish mucus.

Medorrhinum

This can be very valuable in

the treatment of childhood asthma, particularly where asthma and eczema may also be combined. The shortness of breath is reputed to be better when the child kneels on the bed curled up with the chest touching the knees (knee-chest position). Wet weather makes the asthma worse but being at the seaside improves it.

Tuberculinum

This is a useful remedy for asthma sufferers as it helps build up the immune system to try to prevent recurrent colds and chest infections which may precipitate asthma attacks.

“One-liners”, which may direct towards a particular remedy, are:

- Wheezing improved by belching: *Carbo vegetabilis*
- Cough improved by taking cold drinks: *Cuprum metallicum*
- Asthma symptoms improved at night by lying: *Euphrasia*
- Cough worse from eating: *Kali bichromium*
- Marked sneezing that makes asthma attack worse or provokes an attack; coughing causes tears: *Sabadilla*.

Finally asthma sufferers include many famous people from the past and present day. Beethoven, Charles Dickens, Che Guevara, John F Kennedy, Elizabeth Taylor and Judy Collins number in their ranks. Besides having asthma in common, they all led or lead active, full, varied and energetic lives – the ultimate aim for all asthma patients.