

The menopause

Hot flushes, irritability, tearfulness – all problems that can be helped homeopathically, writes *Anne Clover*

Many patients speak enthusiastically of the help they have received from homeopathic treatment for menopausal symptoms as various as hot flushes, profuse sweating, mood swings, irritability and sleep disturbance. These reports are now supported by careful follow-up studies from NHS outpatient units in the UK of the benefits homeopathic treatment has afforded for such problems. A study conducted at the Tunbridge Wells Homeopathic Hospital in 1997 showed that around 300 consultations that year were for patients whose main complaints were focused on the menopause. The same study indicated that just over 70 per cent of the patients seeking this help reported an improvement.

A homeopathic pharmacy can offer a wide range of medicines that could be appropriate for patients with menopausal reactions. This is because of the emphasis placed in homeopathic practice on selecting a medicine suited to the overall profile of the individual patient. This means that we do not have a homeopathic HRT equivalent, or a single medicine that might apply for a lot of women with

menopausal symptoms. Instead a prescription is chosen that relates to the individual profile of the patient seeking help.

A consultation for homeopathic treatment of menopausal symptoms may refer first to details of relatively focal symptoms such as excess sweating, flushes or sleep disturbance. The next stage of the review may then involve discussion of more generalised reactions such as mood changes, thought patterns and energy levels. For further clarification of the patient's profile, questions are often asked about any particular circumstances that trigger the relatively focal or more generalised symptoms, and about her general health. All such data contribute to the review of her personal profile.

We do not have a homeopathic HRT – a prescription is chosen that relates to the individual profile of the patient

For instance, a patient with hot flushes may be asked if these occur mainly at a specific time of day or night; are worse in company or solitude; or seem to be made worse by particular food or drink. Similarly for more

generalised effects such as mood swings, information about factors that seem to make them better or worse can be very helpful for homeopathic prescribing. Such questions help clarify what we might term the individual patient's reaction pattern. They are part of the individual's profile and are an important aid for the selection of a homeopathic prescription.

To illustrate how such ideals can be applied in practice here are four summaries of reports from patients with the sort of detail that would be very useful for homeopathic prescribing. I admit there is a degree of "poetic licence" here as few patients would give their reports with as much detail, but they are offered to indicate the range of information needed for homeopathic prescribing. After each of them I summarise some of the further information that can assist the selection of a homeopathic medicine.

A 54 year-old woman

"Sorry to bother you, but these hot sweats are such a nuisance and I am fed up with them. I hate being a nuisance and having to take an appointment but I am near

the end of my tether. These sweats have been bothering me for about eight years, they started just before my periods stopped and seem to have got steadily worse. They are especially bad in the evening and night, it is as if they well up from my feet. The sweat rolls off me. I feel so embarrassed. I just want to hide. Between these blasts of heat and sweat I get cold and shivery so I am opening and closing the window like a yo-yo. The family try to help or humour me but that makes it worse. I really wish they would leave me alone. They used to pacify me with a nice plate of cheese and pickle but even that annoys me now. I can still enjoy a good evening out dancing - that has always been my escape. But at other times I am just fed up and irritable - hardly surprising since I sleep badly. I often wake at 2 or 3am and cannot sleep again because I cannot stop thinking about everything. The family seem to avoid me in the mornings. That suits me, I am tired and worn out."

Additional information

- Despite tiredness, feels better for exercise, such as a session in the gym or a good long run. Often prone to restless fidgeting.
- Other mood changes include, impatience; lack of enjoyment of most things, "even the grandchildren are a drag".
- Concerning sexual activity, definitely not enjoyed, can be averse to it.
- Strong food or drink likes or dislikes – averse to fats, loves vinegar and enjoys a cold glass of really dry wine.

Prescription: consider Sepia 30c

A 46 year-old woman

"Thank you for seeing me. I especially like talking to a woman about these problems, I am a bit scared of the men. My problem now is hot flushes. I so easily get hot and flustered. My periods are a bit irregular, and I still get PMT but I phone my mum and she listens and helps me. It is the hot surges that bother me. Then I get shivery after it. It makes me feel really weepy. My female friends try and help, I like that. But sometimes I upset them because I get a bit moody or sulky. I don't want to be like this, it really upsets me. I can't seem to make my mind up about anything. I have never been confident, but now even the bit of confidence I had is gone. My friends say I cry easily, one of them called me a leaky tap. I felt really hurt. My moods seem to change so quickly. I try and hide it because I want my friends to stay with me, but I cannot help crying when I am really fed up. That makes some of them leave me and I really don't want to be alone. I get frightened, especially in the dark evenings."

Additional information

- Usually a conscientious, timid, yielding person but if pushed can be very angry.
- Enjoys a stroll in a light breeze. Gentle exercise helps, not too vigorous.
- Highly sensitive, easily hurt and inclined to show her feelings.
- Concerning food and drink preferences, hates fats, loves sweet things and is well known for her lack of thirst. Has a particular intolerance of pork.

Prescription: consider Pulsatilla 30c



Some effects of the menopause – like tiredness and irritability – can mar the joys of becoming a grandmother

A 58 year-old woman

"Thank you for seeing me today. I apologise for bothering you with something so trivial but these menopausal effects are a nuisance. I tried to keep it to myself, but I broke down in the Well Woman clinic last week when I was having the routine checks and the sister, who knows I am not supposed to have HRT, suggested homeopathy might help. So here I am. Sorry, I really should be able to contain my feelings. The flushes are a bit of a problem, but I am more bothered by the vaginal dryness and irritability. It has made it even more difficult for me to oblige my husband. "Sorry, I don't find it easy

to talk about this. It all got much worse when Mother died a year ago. I have tried to keep going, but just do not enjoy life as I used to. The family said I coped well when Mum died, but I know I hid my feelings. It was, and still is, easier to cry alone. I cope okay at home but it is getting more difficult. I know I am snappy, then I regret it and feel worse. Sometimes I feel so anxious, I have no idea why, it just comes over me. One definite problem is noise, I really can't stand it, so the grandchildren leave me feeling quite exhausted. I am sorry to have to admit all of this, it really is not me to talk about it, but it has all got too much for me."

Additional information

- A particularly low patch occurs about mid-morning, needs elevenses.
- Does not want sympathy and is prone to suppress emotions but if pushed can show anger.
- Reacts strongly to sea air, usually feels better for it, occasionally worse.
- Concerning food and drink preferences, again, a strong reaction to salt, usually craves it but occasionally averse. Hates fat or slippery food, dislikes and feels worse for coffee, and usually shows a poor tolerance of alcohol

Prescription: consider Natrum mur 30c

A 54 year-old woman

"I saw your partner last week. He said he had tried everything he could think of for my hot flushes and nothing has worked, so he suggested I try homeopathy. So here I am. He looked a bit tired, I don't think he had enough patience to listen to

me anymore. But then I suppose I can be a chatterbox. My family have always told me so. Anyway, about these flushes. They are terrible. They are especially a problem whenever I wake up. Even if I have a catnap, which is rare, I feel awful when I wake up. I have slept badly at night for ages, but this has been much worse since these flushes got going in the last five years. So I feel exhausted and sleepy in the afternoon, but if I nod off I feel even worse.

"Excuse me while I loosen this blouse collar. I always choose loose ones, but this is not quite loose enough for me. I hate tight things anywhere, especially near my neck. I really envy people who can wear nice necklaces or scarves. Anyway, these flushes, they seem to surge up from my feet and leave my head feeling as if it will burst. And they always seem worse on the left side of my head. I have no idea why. Sometimes I feel a bit better if I have a really good sweat. It is as if I get something out of my system. But it does not last and these flushes soon come back again. I can't even enjoy a nice sunny day, the sun soon makes me feel much worse. It really is not surprising that I easily get down in the dumps about it all and feel quite envious of friends who sail through the menopause without these problems."

Additional information

- Tends to be talkative, but ambivalent attitude to company.
- Can be easily offended, critical or suspicious.
- Generally feels better in the open air.

- In earlier years, PMT cleared as soon as her period started.
- A marked tendency to laterality in that any symptoms she experiences are likely to be worse on the left side of her body.
- After sleep, prone to wake feeling unrefreshed and generally worse for it.
- Food and drink preferences – particularly enjoys oysters. Enjoys alcohol but is prone to feel worse after taking it. Likes sharp, acidic drinks.

Prescription: consider Lachesis 30c.

Dose

Patients should take a single tablet of the appropriate prescription three times in the first day then watch for a response. If symptoms improve, no repeat is needed while that improvement lasts. If similar symptoms recur later, the dose could be repeated. If there is no benefit, it is wiser to seek further advice from a homeopathic practitioner.

Many menopausal women find they feel better for some exercise like walking, swimming or cycling

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