

STRESS

Conventional medicine has little to offer, often relying on sedatives or tranquillisers but homeopathy, writes *John Hughes-Games*, can be very effective

Medically, the mental or emotional aspects of stress are exceedingly important. Unhappiness, shock, illness, fear and much else can cause stress, which in turn can make people vulnerable to so many different illnesses both mental and physical. Stress and anxiety go hand in hand; every illness has a degree of anxiety. Even a predominantly physical illness like a sore throat can cause some stress. Certain illnesses have a very large stress component; particularly illnesses like depression, anxiety states and panic attacks.

A person's tolerance of stress varies enormously – some people thrive on it; high-powered businessmen, for instance, who constantly have to make important decisions. Others buckle under quite small stresses and this may lead to illness.

Types of stress

Stress can be divided into four types. Firstly, there is everyday benign stress, the mild stress that stimulates us to get on with things and which stops us from becoming “cabbages”. For instance, on a cold winter's morning it might be very tempting to stay in bed but the stress of knowing that things have got to be done – jobs, housework, paperwork – makes us get up. Nobody likes paying bills but the consequences of not doing so

would certainly lead to worse stress, so we do them! This sort of stress motivates us.

The second is healthy stress – having to meet deadlines, having to speak in public or, on a more physical level, competing in a race or competition. This is the sort of stress that makes us do things we might not particularly want to do but having done them we have a sense of achievement and satisfaction that is extremely good for us.

The third is acute stress – resulting from the shock of, for instance, a burglary, a sudden bereavement or a road accident, or even a more physical cause like being “mugged”, an operation, a haemorrhage.

The fourth might be called malignant stress – for instance, the anxiety, frustration and unhappiness resulting from an unsatisfactory marriage or relationship, having chronic financial problems, having to look after a difficult, disabled or ill relative or having a chronic or disabling illness oneself. This is the sort of stress about which we can do nothing and it is this particularly that concerns us as doctors, as it can lead to mental or physical disease.

If a doctor is good at reassurance he will be able to help his patients through many traumas in their lives. I once had the privilege of working with Dr Blackie who had this quality to a

remarkable degree. Directly she came into the sickroom there was an immediate feeling of “thank goodness here she is, now we will be all right”. The intense worry and anxiety, which were compounding the illness are removed and this “energy”, instead of being dissipated in worry, is redirected to helping the patient to get better. Dr Blackie had the quality that used to be known as “the bedside manner”; a combination of wisdom, knowledge, compassion, humour and common sense – a somewhat rare mixture nowadays when knowledge is considered far more important than any other quality. However perhaps knowledge without wisdom can be dangerous.

How can homeopathy help?

To start with, the homeopathic enquiry is a very profound one and very often during a consultation various factors come to light, which may be creating some degree of anxiety or stress in the patient's life. A discussion as to how they may be overcome, removed or mitigated, can often be very helpful. Discussion itself can be extremely therapeutic. In many cases the patient is anxious or worried because nobody has taken time to talk to them. The homeopathic physician spends a lot of time with patients. It is however very

important that the practitioner should have a sound knowledge of conventional medical diagnosis because during the discussion signs and symptoms of disease which need conventional (sometimes urgent) treatment may emerge and a qualified doctor with a knowledge of diagnosis knows when to refer a patient urgently to the appropriate specialist and is able to do so.

Having carefully assessed the patient, taking into account not only his illness and how he is reacting to it, but his whole make-up, the homeopathic physician then tries to work out the patient's constitutional remedy. If he succeeds in selecting the right remedy, the patient's well-being, resistance, resilience, general health and ability to cope are enhanced and many stress symptoms can be helped.

There are a number of polychrests (medicines of many uses) often prescribed constitutionally, which are particularly appropriate for different sorts of worry and stress. The following I have used to good effect on many occasions: *Lycopodium* for the patient who greatly underestimates their abilities and anticipates every ordeal however small with pessimism; *Silica* patients are terrified of failure and *Calc carb*s are just too weak and exhausted to attempt anything! These medicines are only effective, of course, if they "fit" the patient so far as his whole constitution and make up is concerned.

There are, however, some homeopathic preparations, which are particularly appropriate for acute situations. Here are a few with their indications:



Aconite

This is the most useful medicine in homeopathy for shock whatever the cause, whether physical or mental. It can be a great help for the unfortunate patient who suffers from panic attacks – a tablet or pill in a potency of 30c to be taken at the first sign and if necessary repeated every ten minutes.

Ignatia

This is excellent for bereavement, whether through death or desertion. I once had a family in general practice who had the horrifying experience of having two cot deaths – two sisters whose babies died within forty-eight hours of each other. The whole family was much helped by taking *Ignatia* 30c every two to three hours.

Argentum nit

A most useful medicine for people who feel extremely nervous before an ordeal particularly when the nervousness is felt in the gut and they have diarrhoea or

the "collywobbles". I recommend the 30c potency to be taken before any ordeal.

Gelsemium

Another medicine that can be taken before ordeals, it is appropriate for the patient who freezes either mentally or physically – whose brain seems to seize up under the stress of an examination for instance. 30c is a useful potency.

Arnica

One of the great stand-bys in homeopathic medicine, it is useful for bruises or falls or any sort of trauma as it promotes healing, but it is also very useful in high potency for physical or even emotional exhaustion. For instance for the mother with the very fractious baby who keeps waking up in the night, perhaps due to teething, or the person who is exhausted by having to look after some chronically ill relative. If used in this way *Arnica* should be given in a potency of 10M once a week only.

A Fellow of the Faculty of Homeopathy and a past president, John Hughes-Games FFHom MBChB was taught homeopathy by Margery Blackie and used it in general practice for nearly 30 years. He now lectures and examines for the Faculty as well as working privately in Bristol.