

SPOTLIGHT ON

Nervous system

by Tom Whitmarsh

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Homeopathy can help people cope better with neurological problems

The nervous system can encompass so much. Neurology has to do with any dysfunction of the nervous system, but is generally not held to include those conditions traditionally thought of as psychiatric, such as depression, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders which can all have major effects on the proper functioning of the nervous system. Homeopathy, of course has a large role to play in that area, but this is beyond the scope of this article. I'll content myself with a few remedies or groups of remedies I have found to be helpful in some of the better known neurological conditions, many of which can lead to long-term discomfort or disability. The role of homeopathy in many of these conditions is not to cure but, on the whole, to help people cope better with their difficulties and a qualified physician should always be consulted.

Aetiology

Before enumerating specific symptoms, it is worth commenting on an aspect of how people perceive their illness. Many patients with a chronic, unremitting medical condition, have the impression that their symptoms all stem from a specific event in their lives. In homeopathic terms this possible aetiology is listed in the repertory in the rubric "ailments from..." People might say for example "I've had the headache ever since I fell off that bike and was knocked out", so the homeopathic practitioner might look up "ailments from injury to the head" to include in their analysis and selection of the remedy in a particular case. The teasing out of perceived (and actual) aetiology is a very important part of homeopathic case taking and can be used in just about any condition, but it does seem that there are a few situations in neurology where it is particularly important, for example:

Ailments from grief or loss: perhaps

the death of someone close, or a loved pet; children moving away from home; retirement from a long-held occupation. Here, the remedy *Ignatia* is very useful. I usually use a high potency such as 10M. Remedies useful around retirement include *Aurum* (gold) and *Kali bromatum*.

Ailments from fright or shock: here, people might say "it all began when I saw that car accident" or something similar. Whatever the symptoms or the condition, *Aconite* (again in high potency) is the remedy.

Ailments from a stressful period of nursing someone: this covers the person whose sleep has been disturbed every night for months as they looked after a sick relative. They now have a headache and the remedy might be *Cocculus*.

Ailments from injury: neurologically, we are usually thinking of head injury and many people with multiple sclerosis (MS) or headache date the onset of their symptoms from a car accident or other accident where they hit their head. It is hard not to give a high potency dose of *Arnica* here, though other remedies such as *Hypericum* and *Helleborus* might be appropriate, always of course depending on the particularities of the symptoms. Injuries of the spinal cord causing symptoms (for example post-whiplash headache) are often helped by *Natrum sulphuricum*. Surgery has to be considered as an injury here and these remedies may be called upon when there is pain or other symptoms after spinal or other neurosurgery.

Ailments since an infection: the nosodes come in especially here. Nosodes are homeopathic remedies made from products of disease, or in the case of micro-organisms, sometimes from the bacterium or virus itself. It is entirely safe, as it is used in such high dilutions that no organisms remain, just the healing power. Examples in neurology might be the pain and

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weakness experienced later in life by many who suffered polio as children (the post-polio syndrome) which can be addressed with polio disease nosode. Post-herpetic neuralgia (pain after shingles, persisting when the rash has gone) can respond to the nosode of the herpes simplex virus (which causes shingles). This can also help in the sometimes devastating symptoms experienced by those who have had herpes infection of the brain (encephalitis). Headache or other symptoms following on from meningitis can be addressed with the appropriate nosode (for example Meningococcinum).

So, I'll often give one of these "ailments from..." remedies before another homeopathic remedy. If a clear case emerges in the consultation for a

constitutional remedy, that is one that fits all the aspects discussed very well, from physical to emotional, then I will use that, rather than the remedies below. These are often found to help the specific symptoms mentioned which are those frequently encountered in neurological conditions.

Spasms

Spasms are common in MS, but also in many other long-term neurological conditions. A form which many of us will be familiar with is the cramps felt in the calf muscles after exercise or sometimes at night. Cramps and spasms in MS can be so severe as to be excruciatingly painful, very long-lasting and violent enough to throw the person

out of their bed or wheelchair. Simple cramps often respond to a daily dose of Cuprum 30c or 200c. More severe symptoms might require Strychninum (strychnine is a poison that works by inducing severe spasm in all muscles, including those of breathing) or the nosode made from the tetanus toxoid. I have a number of patients who find their spasm much lessened by a regular dose of Plumbum (lead) or Nux vomica (a plant which contains a large amount of strychnine and so acts homeopathically to spasms).

Fatigue

It is disappointing to have to report that although this is probably the symptom which is most felt in MS and other chronic neurological conditions, there is no specific treatment. Experience suggests that finding the true constitutional similitum is the most helpful thing here.

Bladder symptoms

Frequency, getting up often at night to go to the toilet and more annoyingly having accidents where the sufferer couldn't get to the toilet in time are common in many neurological conditions. In MS, for example, there is often loss of correct sensation in the bladder and the sufferer is not aware of the need to go, so they hold on too long and then they become at risk of recurrent urine infections. The remedies Causticum and Equisetum can help this.

Twitchings, jerkings and other involuntary movements

These may be a symptom of a deeper neurological disorder, such as MS or they may commonly be benign, with no chance of progression, but are just annoying. Either way, frequent, uncontrollable twitches of muscles throughout the body (for example in the eyelid) sometimes respond to Agaricus (the poisonous mushroom fly agaric). People who might respond to this remedy are very chilly, experience burning or itching and might have a disturbed sense of perspective so that movements are awkward or exaggerated. The resemblance to what some people experience with MS is clear. Another remedy with this exaggerated

way of moving (takes a great big step to get over a small object “just in case”) is Onosmodium (the false gromwell), which is a major remedy in cases of MS. It encompasses slowness of thinking and comprehending too.

The remedies made from the spiders can be useful in neurological conditions with unusual movements. People who need spider remedies seem to have an altered sense of the rhythm of life, they are basically speedier than other people. They fill up their life with activity, a fruitless business. In trying to slow down to the general pace of other people, they have to over-control their natural speed which can result in bizarre patterns of movement. Music is very helpful to them as when they tune in to a rhythm they move more easily and it needs to be loud music with a beat. The best known of these spiders as a remedy is Tarantula Hispanica, but it is interesting that most spider poisons are neurotoxins (they act on nerves) and so might be expected to have a role in homeopathically helping neurological conditions. Other spider remedies that might be useful neurologically include Mygale and Theridion.

Restlessness

This is a very frequently reported symptom and often takes the form of just being unable to settle down for the night, especially because the legs feel jumpy and want to keep moving, often forcing the sufferer to get up and pace around to calm things down. The general night-time restlessness can be helped by Arsenicum album or sometimes by Rhus tox. Restless legs often do well with Zincum metallicum.



Patients who need spider remedies have an altered sense of the rhythm of life

Photo: courtesy of Marcus Schmitt www.oeko-msc.de/

Headache

There is a myriad of remedies where headache can be part of the picture, probably because the occasional headache is a near universal human experience. Some specific features are useful though and on the whole are more important in prescribing than knowing a diagnosis, although, of course, there are some headaches indicative of rare underlying disorders and these always need to be ruled out. Features which I have found to be particularly useful remedy-pointers include the following:

- absolute need to stay completely still (not even moving the eyes during a headache attack) – Bryonia;
- one-sided migraine headache occurring especially at weekends, *relieved* by a walk outside (wanting to do anything but go to bed in the dark is an odd feature in migraine) and often associated with nausea or vomiting – Iris versicolor;
- sudden onset bursting pain – Belladonna;
- right-sided pain which comes up from the back of the neck over the side of the head to lodge behind the eye – Sanguinaria.

Other pains

The so-called “Arnica of the nerves”, Hypericum, is appropriate for reducing pain in injury were there is specifically nerve damage. It can even be helpful in reducing the length of relapses in MS (for example in bouts of inflammation of the optic nerve – optic neuritis). I’ll mention two other specific pains, which are always hard to treat conventionally and for which homeopathy sometimes has some answers.

- Peripheral neuropathy: this is often a result of diabetes. The nerves which take sensation from the ends of the limbs (especially, at first, the feet) lose their proper blood supply because of the sugar imbalances in diabetes and so sufferers cannot feel things correctly. This ability to feel is replaced by a nasty pain which is constant and deeply debilitating. For example, patients often say that it

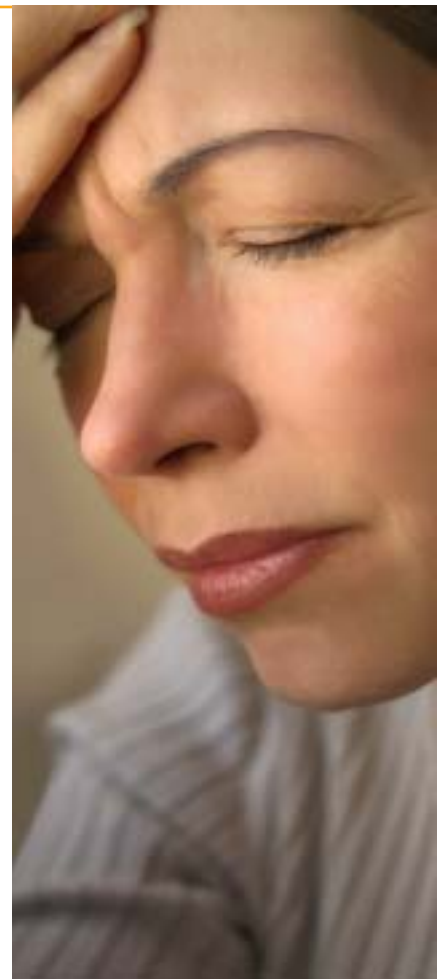


Photo: istockphoto.com/Diane Diederich

feels as if they’re walking on hot pebbles. I have had some success in this situation with the remedy Hydrophis (from the venom of a sea snake) and also Nux vomica. Incidentally, Hydrophis (from another neurotoxic venom) is a great remedy for the after effects of polio. Its major keynote is a split between a strong, “normal” upper part of the body and a weak “abnormal” lower half, often the situation with people who are affected by polio.

- Trigeminal neuralgia: this affects people as bouts of stabs of incredibly severe pain in the area supplied by one branch of the trigeminal nerve on one side of the face. It can be triggered by a variety of stimuli, including touch, brushing the teeth, a cold draught and talking or eating. Sufferers can have many, many stabs in one day and can get seriously depressed with the pain. Conventional treatment relies on anti-convulsant medication taken regularly and sometimes surgery, which can be effective for a while, but the symptoms often return. The remedies Aconite, Verbasicum, Kalmia and Spigelia are among those which can help sufferers.

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Seizures and epilepsy

These are very common – whether present from birth or coming on for no obvious reason in childhood or presenting later in life as the result of strokes or other brain injury. Most people with epilepsy will be controlled to some extent on a variety of anti-convulsant medications. Homeopathy can add to the control but should not be used as the sole treatment. Remedies which can often improve control of childhood epilepsy and sometimes allow reduction in medication, include *Baryta carbonica*, *Cicuta*, *Belladonna*, *Stramonium* and *Hyoscyamus*. *Baryta carbonica* is particularly interesting if the epilepsy is part of a more global delay or impairment in the child's development. It can really "kick start" them and bring them back to a more appropriate level of function. Interestingly, it also has a role at the other end of life, in older people who are perhaps "sliding back" in their functioning. Taking a stroke to be a brain injury, then it is clear that a high potency of *Arnica* post-stroke should be helpful. I have also seen homeopathic

Opium be extremely beneficial in people who have bouts of somnolence and "absence" after strokes, probably amounting to small seizures.

Speech disorders

People's speech can be affected in neurological conditions for a variety of reasons. The loss of normal fluency and content of speech may be transitory, as in some people with migraine, or long-term and fixed, as in some following a stroke. It is common to have some form of speech disturbance after a stroke and this is an area where homeopathy can help. A family of remedies which has a special relationship to speech problems is that of the snakes. The best known snake remedy in homeopathy is *Lachesis*, but not all people who would benefit from a snake remedy will benefit from this particular one. The remedies are usually made homeopathically from the venom, although we do use a number of non-poisonous snakes (such as the *Boa constrictor*) where other parts have to be used.

The idea that there are families of

remedies, usually related botanically or zoologically is very current in homeopathy and so we look to find the "themes" of a family in a particular case and sort out which snake it should be for this individual. Snake "themes" might include a tendency to bleeding and haemorrhages, disordered speech, a feeling of congestion, a dislike of constriction and a feeling you get that they are trying to get your attention in a particular way – seduce you (they often wear very alluring clothes – snake skins are very beautiful). All of these themes are issues you might recognise as belonging to *Lachesis*, but then we can go further and realise that we are actually seeing general snake themes here. Trying to sort out which snake is most appropriate for an individual will then depend on particular characteristics and symptoms of that person. For example, *Naja* (cobra) has stiffness of the neck, *Elaps* (coral snake) expresses himself artistically and creatively and *Crotalus cascavella* is very superstitious and has a great interest in magic and the occult.

Narcolepsy and cataplexy

People with narcolepsy have an inherited predisposition to go to sleep at any time, day or night. The need is unstoppable and can happen at the most awkward times, even in the middle of a conversation. Cataplexy sufferers have attacks in which they become unrousable and unable to communicate, so it looks like sleep, but they are fully aware of what is happening and can remember all that is being said around them. These attacks often happen at times of heightened emotion, so laughing or crying can be a trigger (or a medical consultation!). They quite often sustain injuries in their sudden fall into an attack with no warning and frequently end up in ambulances against their will (they are unable to resist). The conventional treatment of these conditions involves amphetamines. I have found that the remedy *Nux moschata* (nutmeg) can give good relief and avoid the need for high doses of conventional drugs.

Photo: Dr. Morley Read/Science Photo Library



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