



Life stages



Homeopathy for mother & baby – the first year

by Bob Leckridge

A major new seven-part series

Life stages – a homeopathic guide

From the moment we are born, through every day of our lives, we undergo constant change. We mature, we grow, we develop, responding to both environmental influences and to the programmes in our genes. This series examines some of the issues we encounter in the various phases of our lives. Each stage brings new challenges, so each article will focus on the kinds of health problems, which people might encounter in each particular stage.

The focus of the articles is self-help but if the problem is complex, or chronic, the best course of action might be to consult a homeopathic doctor. Most of the problems discussed here are acute, self-limiting conditions, which can be safely treated with homeopathic medicines. If you have some symptoms which would normally lead you to consult your doctor, see your GP or, if you have one, your homeopathic doctor. Don't try to treat a problem yourself with homeopathy instead of consulting your doctor.

Why consider homeopathy for mums and babies? There are at least three good reasons. The first is that it's safe. Although many homeopathic medicines are prepared from plants and other substances which are poisonous in their raw form, by the time they have been prepared as medicines for sale or prescription they are completely non-toxic and they be given safely to breast-feeding mums as well as to children, from the first day of life onwards. The second reason is that the remedies work by stimulating the body's own healing mechanisms. That's not to say the modern medicine is of no value. Quite the contrary. For example, the technological and scientific breakthroughs in caring for premature babies have enabled many more such children to survive those difficult first few weeks. Modern methods of care have also made death during childbearing a rarity in our country.

However, health is about more than mere survival and whilst these advances have undoubtedly been life-saving, other, more holistic approaches are needed to promote and maintain a more comprehensive well-being. This leads me to my third reason – understanding health and understanding people from a homeopathic perspective really helps us to make sense of not only our illnesses but the health and development of our children.

Let's start with mum, because when you come home with the new baby, everybody is thrilled with the baby and, sometimes, mum gets a little forgotten. In the first few days there are a couple of problems which might need attention.

Mother

Wound healing

Arnica is probably taken by many women after the baby is born as it is good for helping the body to heal areas of bruising. However, I don't recommend it routinely because often *Bellis perennis* (the daisy) is more effective. This has been described as the "gynaecological Arnica". It certainly seems to help better when most of the bruising is internal. Like Arnica, the bruise is painful and the person doesn't want the sore bit to be touched. In fact, they are likely to downplay the whole problem and be quite uncomplaining even though they may be feeling quite distressed about it.

Bruising, however, may not be the main problem. Sometimes a more pressing problem is a tear or a cut (an episiotomy). This is more common if there has been a forceps delivery. The wound is acutely painful and the woman will probably be feeling pretty aggrieved at having had the cut done. She will

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be feeling hard done by, or feeling that she wasn't treated well by the staff.

The homeopathic term for this is "indignation" – the feeling that "it shouldn't have happened to me. It's not fair!" This state is typical of the remedy *Staphysagria* and if taken over the next few days, it can promote the healing of the wound as well as begin to settle the woman's distress. *Staphysagria* is also a great remedy for healing clean, surgical cuts, so it is also indicated after caesarean section.

Another useful remedy to have to hand is *Calendula*. Often the

damage to the tissues after childbirth is quite superficial. By that, I mean on the surface. There are multiple grazes and superficial lacerations. This kind of wound can be helped with *Calendula*. I would recommend that the homeopathic form be used and taken as tablets or powders by mouth because the local applications and creams can sometimes irritate the delicate tissues of the vagina

Breast problems

Mastitis is a common problem. When it occurs suddenly and the breast becomes red, swollen, hot

and tender, then *Belladonna* might speed resolution of the problem, although antibiotics may still be indicated. If the inflammation isn't caught early enough, and an abscess has formed then *Hepar sulph* might be a better-indicated remedy. Usually once the pus has formed, the stage of *Belladonna* has passed.

Cracked nipples can be very painful and really make breast-feeding difficult, if not impossible. When the cracks are accompanied by sharp, shooting pains in the breast when the baby feeds, then *Phytolacca* may help, especially if the pains seem to shoot out from the breast to other parts of the body.

Calendula cream is a good application for cracked nipples. Stitching pain in the breast when the baby feeds in the absence of cracks around the nipples can be helped with *Kali carbonicum*.

Baby blues

"Baby blues" are very common around the fifth day. You might find yourself becoming very tearful and upset at that time, or, alternatively, irritable and anxious. If you find that having company at this time helps, then you may find *Pulsatilla* helpful. However, if you find that company and consolation actually make you feel worse, then *Natrum muriaticum* might be the more indicated medicine.

Postnatal depression, on the other hand, is far more serious. If your sad or upset feelings continue beyond a few days then it would be a good idea to discuss it with your health visitor, midwife, or GP. Even in the most troublesome postnatal depression, homeopathic remedies can be useful, but in such a situation it's harder to self-treat so it would be better to consult a homeopathic specialist.



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Baby

Colic

This miserable condition causes enormous distress to babies and their parents. There are no good, safe drugs available, so homeopathic medicines are a great idea. There are two main remedies to consider. If the baby settles a bit when held face down with the tummy supported by the parent's hand, or if they settle when their tummy is pressed against the parent's shoulder, then there is a good chance that Colocynthis will help. If these positions don't help but rubbing the tummy lightly, or holding a warm hand against the baby's tummy, helps, then Magnesium phosphoricum is more likely to help.

Teething

Teething is that other early trial which disrupts the peace of the family sleep. The most typical pattern is the baby with a bright red cheek, screaming with anger, who settles when carried around the room. This is the picture of Chamomilla.

Sleep

Sleep, or rather, lack of it, is a common problem when there is a young baby in the house. It's important to understand the place of sleep in a baby's life and not treat this issue as a disease. Initially, babies need a lot of sleep and really only wake for food or drink. They soon start to develop waking periods however and within a few short weeks are already starting to smile in response to smiles and to have periods of great alertness where they lie with eyes wide open taking in their surroundings. Babies cry for many reasons. The physical reasons include being hungry or thirsty, being physically



uncomfortable and feeling insecure or unhappy.

It's always important to check and see if any of these common factors are playing a part. However, in some children, they continue to cry despite the exclusion of physical factors. Colic and teething are common explanations for sleep disturbance that won't clear up without help.

What do we do with the babies who just won't sleep? If underlying reasons of discomfort or pain have been excluded there are a couple of homeopathic remedies worth trying. Firstly, there is Jalapa. This remedy is indicated in babies who are "good all day and bad all night" particularly in those who have a tendency to diarrhoea, or just very loose stools. The other remedy to consider is Cypripedium, which is indicated in infants who are just alert and active. They wake up through the night and just want fun. They are obviously not distressed, unlike the Jalapa babies who are most distressed at night.

We can get other clues about the remedies our children might need by observing them during the night. Do they get hot and sweaty and throw off the covers, which is typical of Sulphur? Do they sweat on their heads at

night, making the pillow wet, like Calcarea phosphoricum? Do they usually sleep in a particular position? (Medorrhinum children sleep on their tummies with their bottoms sticking up in the air. Pulsatilla children sleep on their backs with their arms stretched out above their heads.)

Development

All babies develop at their own rates. However, some babies definitely develop more slowly than others. The slowest ones are usually the rather chubby ones, who sit about without expressing much sense of adventure. These might be kids whose teeth are slow to come through, who are a bit sweaty, and may be constipated. These might be typically Calcarea carbonica or Baryta carbonica children. Which of the two they are is hard to tell when they are very young, but as they get a little older other personality characteristics become clearer. They are both quite fearful, the Baryta baby is shyer than the Calc baby and is more likely to have developmental delay. I think it is hard to self treat at this level but some of the child's characteristics will give the clues your homeopathic doctor needs to find the right remedy to stimulate maturational growth.

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Immunisation

This is a very difficult subject for parents. It's all about trying to choose the path of least risk for you child. I think you need to consider each immunisation separately. What is the disease which we are trying to protect the child from? How serious may that disease be for the child if they catch it, and how significant is the risk of catching it? After consideration of those questions, we then ask, what are the risks associated with the immunisation? We then try to do the best for our children and choose the lowest risk. When you stop to consider this you will realise that there are no rules, no hard and fast conclusions which are applicable in all children at all times and in all places.

There isn't a homeopathic alternative vaccination programme. However, this doesn't mean that homeopathy has no role to play here. There are two approaches to consider. Firstly, when it is judged that a particular immunisation is a preferred choice, and we go ahead and vaccinate a child, sometimes there are obvious short term problems afterwards. Homeopathic medicines can help to treat, what we refer to as, ailments from vaccination. This might be anything from a local reaction at the site of the injection which may be hot, red and painful and need Belladonna, to bruising which might be helped by Arnica, to local pain and discomfort which might be helped by Ledum, which is great for puncture wounds. If there are more long-

lasting problems after immunisation then a dose of Thuja might help to sort things out.

Secondly, some people advocate giving a child his or her "constitutional" remedy to boost his or her immune system. The idea of a "constitutional" remedy is one which is chosen to match the character and characteristics of the person who is going to be treated. When given, it will stimulate the body's systems of defence and repair. Think of it as a kind of tonic. If it works then the body will be in a more optimal state of health and therefore better placed to defend itself against infections.

Understanding your baby

Knowing that there is such a wide range of personalities and characteristics described in the homeopathic literature helps us to accept the uniqueness of our own children. How are they different? Begin to notice when they are most at ease and when they don't feel secure. This might be different times of day or night. It might be about the social environment, for example, how are they with mum, with dad, with brothers and sisters and with

strangers. What kinds of toys do they seem to enjoy most? Are they explorers and adventurers, or do they prefer to occupy themselves with a single toy? What do they seem to be scared of? What do you do to settle them down when they are upset? Noting these kinds of things quickly gives you a sense of their unique character. But homeopathy doesn't stop there. The understanding of homeopathy is that we are unique in our whole beings and express ourselves through our whole beings. It really is a holistic understanding. So, noticing the physical features of your baby will help in finding the best remedies for them too. Are they hot children or chilly children? Are they sweaty? What is their normal sleep pattern and what position are they in when you check them in their cots at night? What foodstuffs do they refuse and which, if any, upset them? Do they like to drink, and, if so, what do they like to drink? As you build up the picture of your baby you'll be struck by how different he or she is from your other children and from other people's children. That uniqueness is a great thing.

If you are going to use any of the medicines mentioned, unless a specific dose is recommended by your homeopathic doctor, use a 30c strength and repeat the doses as often as is necessary. For babies crush one pillule between two spoons, add to a small amount of mineral or distilled water and give one teaspoon for a dose. The rule in homeopathy is to take a dose, experience the improvement, then if the improvement starts to decline, repeat the remedy. If a dose does not produce any improvement, then there is no point in repeating that particular remedy.

Bob Leckridge MBChB FFHom graduated from Edinburgh University in 1978 and worked as a GP until 1995 since when he has worked full-time as a Specialist in Homeopathic Medicine at Glasgow Homoeopathic Hospital. He teaches homeopathy internationally and is the author of *Homeopathy in Primary Care*. He became President of the Faculty of Homeopathy in 1998.