



Homeopathy for toddlers

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.

Toddlers is a strange word, but it captures quite nicely the main characteristic of this age group. Babies lie quietly or they squirm and scream noisily, but you can be pretty sure that they stay where you put them. Then one day you look down at the floor or on the bed where you laid your child and they are somewhere else! Not far away, but they've definitely wriggled and rolled away from the patch where you placed them. With these first moves they are learning that there is a world to explore. It takes a few months more but before you know it they are up on their feet, then "cruising" round the furniture, then launching out unsupported into the middle of the room.

Each of these stages brings great joy to the parents. It's like watching the emergence of a little person. It IS the emergence of a little person! It's in these next few months that you will begin to see strong character traits emerge. The individuality of babies really begins to manifest in the toddler years.

To use a homeopathic approach to health, this individuality is the key. Let's look at some of the ways in which differences emerge. A fundamental characteristic is speed, or pace, and this becomes clear, very quickly, once the toddler becomes a bit surer of his or her new-found ability to travel. Some toddlers are fast. They run everywhere. They never play with a toy for long and are easily distracted by others. They eat quickly, move quickly and never seem to stop.

Other toddlers prefer a slower pace in life. They sit quietly for ages absorbed with a simple toy (or, even, frustratingly for the parents, with the packaging in which a gift has been wrapped!). They eat slowly and they move slowly. The faster ones may develop faster, acquiring new skills weeks, if not months, before their slower cousins. These differences can cause concern, but in most circumstances, they are just differences. It's not that the faster ones will be necessarily smarter than the ones who prefer a more leisurely pace. It just seems that way if developmental milestones are being reached more quickly.

What is normal?

It's important to understand that there is a wide variation in "normal" at this time and as a new parent you don't have much prior knowledge of this. That's why the developmental checks provided by GPs and health visitors are so useful. These professionals understand the range of "normal" and can give great reassurance, or, if necessary, spot problems early so that the child can have special attention and support. Without an acceptance of individuality, there will be pressure to expect all children to have the same pace, the same speed of development. This would be wrong.

The tendency to medicalise life is huge in our society. Not being the same as someone else is not an illness. Homeopathy helps us to understand this. If toddlers have different characteristics then they

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will have different needs. The busy active ones need a different kind of attention from the quietly absorbed ones. What healthy toddlers don't need is homeopathic treatment. There is a tendency, in some circles, to seek to prescribe "constitutional" medicines for toddlers (I raised the issue of "constitutional" medicines in the last article) – either to help them develop faster, or to try and get them to slow down. I think this is a mistake. It is misguided and it won't work. If a child is healthy, then a homeopathic medicine won't make a difference to them. It won't change their personality. It won't change their behaviour and it won't make them healthier. However, as health is not a fixed state, this can be a hard judgement to make. What if a fast-paced child isn't coping so well with life? Won't a homeopathic remedy help them then? Well, probably, yes, it will.

So how can a parent decide when their child needs treatment? There is a clear trigger point – concern. If you are concerned, anxious or worried about your

child, then you are right to discuss this with a professional. If your doctor or health visitor has homeopathic skills they will be able to take a holistic view which focuses on the child overall and not just a disease view which leads to your concerns being dismissed in the absence of identifiable disease. However, if the professional you consult hasn't been trained in the assessment of child development and child health, then they might either miss a problem, or medicalise a healthy child. This is why it is important to be sure your chosen professional has the necessary skills.

Homeopathic treatment is an excellent choice for a child who isn't coping well at this stage in life. This is exactly the right time to give a "constitutional remedy". However, how are you to know they are not coping well? There are a number of possible ways. One of the key characteristics of this stage of life is growth, so a regular charting of the child's height and weight on paediatric growth charts by your GP or health visitor enables them to detect a problem early when the "growth velocity" tails off (that is the speed of growth – which is actually more important than the absolute height and weight). Another clue will be when your child suddenly changes. His or her behaviour is "out of character" or different from his or her own normal. Parents are very good at spotting these subtle changes and this can alert them to an infection. Distress is another phenomenon which provokes a parent to seek help – either that their child is frequently distressed, or that their child is frequently distressing others!

So, what about the more obvious problems, which are typical in this age group? Let's consider possible homeopathic treatments of some of them.

Temper tantrums

"The terrible twos" is a famous phrase. This gives a couple of clues. First, two year olds can be problematic and, secondly, it's two year olds (they are only two for a year!). Why are they "terrible"? Well, they have learned to "toddle" and now they have a whole world to explore. The concept of not having their needs met instantly is a new one to them. When they could only lie in their cots they would just scream and pretty much usually someone would turn up and attend to their needs. Now they have the possibility of going and getting for themselves and they are coming up against the fact that world doesn't actually revolve around them after all.

Let me describe a couple of explorer types for you. You might recognise someone. First, there is a hot child, who throws off their covers at night with the heat. They've got hot hands, and hot feet, and they sweat quite easily. They are interested in everything and never settle to anything for long. They have good appetites and like to eat tasty things – especially the things that parents say are bad for them! They are messy children, creating disorder everywhere as they go exploring. They are also great collectors and might start to hoard all kinds of strange things. In fact, they get quite upset if you try to throw anything away. They hate to get washed and can make a real fuss at bath time. These children might be troubled with eczema, with red, itchy patches on their skin. This is the Sulphur child.

Now, let's consider a different kind of explorer. This child may be an attractive child, with long eyelashes. They never sit still. They are always on the go. They don't sleep so well as the Sulphur child, and they might wake up wanting something to eat. These children



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have a real stubborn streak. When they make up their mind to something it is hard to get them to change. They can have spectacular temper tantrums with quite a degree of destructiveness. They are always breaking toys and tearing books in their anger. They also have lots of fears and are especially scared of dogs, of the darkness and of thunderstorms. These children typically catch every cold which is going, and have chronic catarrh with swollen glands in the neck, and they have a tendency to chronic respiratory problems like asthma. This is the child who needs *Tuberculinum bovim*.

These are only two examples of adventurous two year olds, but you can see that they have quite different characters, typically get different kinds of illnesses and are likely to get angry in different situations.

Here are two general tips for dealing with the "terrible twos". Two year olds need to explore. Playing with them with toys and

games which interest them and encourage their exploration will help them to grow and mature. They also need structure. If the world has no boundaries then it becomes a chaotic and scary place. They respond well to rhythms of all kinds, so they can anticipate a structure to the day. A routine bed time is a good idea, for example.

They also need consistency to their structure. If you are going to set a boundary, then do stick with that boundary, no matter the strategies of tears or destruction which your little darling might deploy to try to get you to move your boundaries. It is important, therefore, to have boundaries (rules, limits) which are reasonable and which you, yourself, can keep. It is also important that different family members stick to the same boundaries.

Febrile convulsions

Children between the ages of four months and four years can potentially have a convulsion

when they have a high fever. This is very scary to witness, but is usually mercifully brief and ultimately harmless. After the age of four, this potential seems to go away. If your child has been diagnosed as having this problem, what can you do? The main preventative treatment is to control the fever quickly, so, in addition to the normal methods of preventing overheating in the room and sponging with tepid water, the classic homeopathic remedy in this situation is *Belladonna*.

Belladonna, acutely, is most useful in sudden, high fevers. The child will become restless and agitated. They will probably have bright red cheeks, look and feel hot, and have a dry mouth and dilated pupils. They may even start to hallucinate and become a bit delirious. This is a classic picture of *Belladonna*. Make up a 30c potency in a glass of water and give a spoonful of the water to the child every few minutes until he, or she, starts to settle. *Belladonna* can produce a resolution to an acute fever faster than any other treatment I know. Some children have a tendency to high fevers and to febrile convulsion repeatedly. This is best treated with the child's "constitutional" medicine which will involve a homeopathic consultation with your doctor.

Croup

Croup is another frightening acute complaint which typically occurs in young children. Its sound is distinctive, described as a "barking cough" because it sounds like a dog barking. It is very alarming and the child cannot breathe easily so quickly becomes distressed and agitated. The traditional treatment for it is steam. Sitting with the child in a steamy bathroom or kitchen often eases the cough and allows the

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child to settle down to sleep. However, if this cough doesn't settle quickly the doctor needs to be called and the child may even have to be admitted to hospital.

However, this is another situation where homeopathic remedies can work extremely well. There used to be a product marketed as "croup powders". These were five numbered sachets which were to be given in sequence, starting with powder one. If this powder failed to settle the croup, the instruction was to move on and give powder two, then three. As the child began to settle at this point, the instruction was to alternate powders four and five until the situation resolved.

Here is what was in those five powders. Powder one was Aconite, number two was Spongia and number three was Hepar sulph. Powder four was Spongia again and powder five was Hepar sulph again. This is still a good regime. Aconite is a great acute medicine, especially for sudden onset coughs with fever and agitation, maybe brought on by playing outside in a cold wind. It is said that Aconite should be given "with the first sneeze". It is a good, early use, acute cough and cold medicine. Try it first and try it early.

If this fails to relieve the cough within the first 15 to 30 minutes, then try Spongia. Typically, Spongia is indicated when there is some roughness or soreness of the throat, and it is needed when the disease has got a bit more of a hold than at the Aconite stage. If this fails to settle things within

the next 15 to 30 minutes you should move on to Hepar sulph. This is most often indicated when the child is a bit toxic, with a high fever, chilly, irritable and sensitive to noises, to light, to drafts. It is quite common for parents to learn which of these three remedies is actually best for their own child and as each episode of croup commences to immediately give the one which typically works best for their son or daughter.

Recurrent ear infections and glue ear

Ear infections are probably the most common type of infection in this age group and they are often caused by viruses. This means that antibiotics will not be of any assistance. Ear infection can be quite sudden and very painful. You want to give something, which is going to relieve the pain quickly. Belladonna, which I mentioned earlier, is commonly indicated for ear infections. For it to be useful, the child should have a fever, probably redness to the face and/or external ear, be

agitated and restless.

Aconite which I also described earlier can be very useful if the infection comes on after exposure to cold, dry winds and if you catch it at the earliest stage. The Hepar sulph, also described in the treatment of croup can be indicated for the ear infections too, but, here, the child would be toxic, irritable and complaining of sharp pains sticking in the ear.

Recurrent ear infections can lead to "glue ear". This is where a sticky fluid builds up in the inner ear causing deafness. A great medicine for this is Pulsatilla. It helps best in children who are a bit shy, very sociable, and who love to be outside playing. When you see them asleep in bed, they may be lying on their backs with their arms stretched out above their heads. There are other medicines which may help this complaint, but, being a chronic condition, I would recommend you seek the professional help of a homeopathically trained doctor or nurse.

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 toddlers 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.

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