

Graphites

Jenny Boyle profiles this often under-used and under-valued medicine



It was Samuel Hahnemann who first proved this wonderful remedy. His instructions for preparing it were: “Pulverise one grain of the purest black lead taken from a fine English pencil, and prepare the triturations and dilutions in the usual fashion.”

Graphites, one of the carbon remedies, which also contains a small percentage of iron, is a major eczema remedy, and it is prescribed extensively for this condition, as well as other skin problems. However, it has a much wider picture. Classically, the following are features of the patient who needs Graphites.

Fatness

Their appearance is often described as obese, but at the same time poorly nourished, with a pale, puffy look reminiscent of Calc carb. The face is said to have a pale, waxy, sickly hue.

Coldness

It is an extremely chilly remedy, and patients can be sensitive to the least draft of cold air. But they are also averse to great heat and feel oppressed in a hot stuffy atmosphere. They can crave air like Pulsatilla and Carbo veg. Sweating on the least exertion and profuse night sweats which stain linen yellow are also features. Foot sweats are offensive.

Tiredness

Patients are often excessively tired and sleepy. There is utter lack of zest for any form of activity and a tendency to sudden onset of exhaustion, with a desire to lie down. Drowsiness by day is followed by sleeplessness at night so they feel unrefreshed in the morning.

Flushing

As with Ferrum, there can be a rush of blood to the head with a flushing face. At the same time there can be icy cold hands and feet. A peculiar aspect of Graphites patients is that they become flushed just before experiencing a physical symptom.

Aversion to sweets & salt

The aversion to sweets can be striking in children.

A great skin remedy

Eruptions

There is a liability to skin eruptions, particularly

eczema. The dry skin cracks and flakes. Where the skin cracks, there is the thick honey-like fluid characteristic of Graphites that dries into yellow crusts. The influential US physician who advocated high potencies, James Tyler Kent (1894-1916), noticed that the eruptions of Graphites are apt to occur on flexor surfaces, that is in the bends of elbows, groins, behind the ears, in the corners of the mouth, and in the eyelids.

Fissures

Graphites patients can also have fissuring of the skin, especially at the mucocutaneous borders (eg sides of nose, mouth and anus), as is found in the remedy Nitric acid.

Thickening

There is a tendency to thickenings in the skin eg the eczema areas can be thickened and there is a tendency to form thick scars (keloids) after a wound or surgical operation. Also, the nails can be thick and distorted.

Graphites skin cases

E.B. Nash (1838-1914), a US physician and exponent of keynotes, described several cases cured by Graphites. One of these was an old, obese woman, with eczema on her legs. He wrote: “Sulphur brought out a rash all over the body which exuded a glutinous, sticky fluid. A dose of Graphites

cured the eczema and left the skin as smooth as that of a child.” His conclusions about Graphites were that “it cures complaints of many kinds, when you have present two things: firstly the peculiar tendency to obesity and secondly the characteristic glutinous eruptions.”

I have successfully treated a number of patients myself with Graphites; one is a little girl, now aged two and a half years. Her mother initially brought her to see me as a six month old baby with severe eczema. This had developed at the age of two weeks, first on her face only, but then spreading down to involve much of the rest of her body. She also had cradle cap. Of note was that she had severe problems with her bowel as soon as she was born, and had to have bowel surgery as well as lots of antibiotics. She was an unhappy baby, with angry red skin on her face, and over her abdomen and legs. At this time, the eczema was dry, and I treated her initially with Sulphur. Although she improved for a short while, things then got worse and in particular the skin behind her ears broke

down, and became cracked and weepy. I therefore switched her remedy to Graphites, in a dose of 6c daily (weekdays only).

Since then, her skin has gradually improved and her mother is delighted. I saw her recently, and she has just a few areas of slightly dry skin on her face. She still uses the Graphites if the eczema flares, but this is now a very unusual occurrence.

Kent was impressed by the use of Graphites in problems due to scar tissue. He tells of the case of a girl with a stiff elbow after inflammation, due to rheumatics: “She had the adhesions broken down, but they recurred, and she again presented herself a year later. She got Graphites and in a month’s time the elbow was found to be freely movable.”

A gastro-intestinal medicine

Graphites is of great value in the treatment of gastric or duodenal ulcer and other stomach problems. There is stomach pain, often some hours after food, which is relieved by hot food or drink, especially warm milk. There

can be acute attacks of heartburn often accompanied by a feeling of intense heat in the stomach and throat, causing a desire for cold drinks, but this aggravates.

Graphites can also be used in the treatment of constipation, especially where the stools are large, hard, knotty and covered in viscid mucus.

The menopause

Graphites can be a good remedy for menopausal symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats, irregular or late periods, decreased libido and vaginal dryness.

The mental picture of Graphites

Blandness

The eminent Greek homeopath George Vithoulkas, who pioneered the psychological essence of the constitutional remedies, says the main idea that comes to mind in Graphites is blandness. They don’t seem to degenerate into deep mental pathology – it is the blandness that stays with them. He says: “Outside impressions do not seem to penetrate, resulting in a blandness of the entire system. The mind is dull and lethargic, slow to receive information. In the interview, the patient will answer questions only superficially. It seems difficult to make contact in any real way with the patient.”

Jan Scholten, a leading Dutch homeopath whose work has been pivotal in the understanding of the mineral remedies, expands on this: they adopt a fixed set of values, usually copied from their parents or tradition. They switch off the mind and just carry on. They do everything “because it should be done like that”.

The prominent Indian



Graphites can cure eczema leaving the skin as smooth as a baby's

homeopath and prolific author Rajan Sankaran takes this further: “They have problems with understanding and comprehension, eg at a conference when the speaker says something that excites them and you ask them what was said, they try to repeat, *word for word*, but cannot be precise because precision involves understanding and comprehending. This comes very close to Baryta carb – both have incapacity to think and abstract.”

Poor memory

They have a poor memory, especially the short-term memory.

Indecisive

There is also irresolution and they cannot make even the simplest of decisions. They cannot plan and there is a strong feeling of inadequacy.

According to Sankaran: “The Graphites patient will say about themselves: to me, survival depends on not bothering about the big things in life, there are others to take care of them. I do not have to make decisions because someone else will make them for me.”

Trifles

One of the main things about the Graphites mental picture is that patients can be upset or irritable about trifles. They are also conscientious about trifles, which can make them fastidious. They weep on the least pretext or for no reason at all. The Graphites wife who bores her husband with trivia has also been described.

Weepy

Graphites can resemble Pulsatilla because of this weepiness. But it is sentimental weeping. They don't weep from depression.

They can be weepy, sad, despondent, full of self-pity and, at times, pre-occupied with thoughts of death. When they are in an unhappy mood, listening to music makes them feel even more miserable.

Fearful

Graphites is one of the main remedies in the rubric “ailments from anticipation”. They are anxious, restless, apprehensive, full of fearful forebodings which cannot be stilled. They are timid people who lack self-confidence. This self-doubt creates anxiety. They are always uneasy and fretful, with a feeling that misfortune is just around the corner.

Mood swings

A quick change of moods is characteristic. They are often quite cheerful in the morning, but show signs of agitation, impatience and irritability, especially in the late afternoon and evening. There is a desire for solitude because they are annoyed by everybody. They may get really angry and fly into a rage, but are easily consoled.

Sankaran's picture of Graphites

Rajan Sankaran encourages us to keep an open mind about Graphites and not adhere strictly to a rigid image of the remedy as described above. While Vithoulkas paints the bland, dull picture of Graphites, Sankaran shows us another view with two very striking features: excitability and weeping.

Excitability: the Graphites patient is very, very excitable. They become excited by the smallest possible thing. This excitability can be expressed as sentimental, despairing, irritated, or sad. The slightest cause is sufficient to create

turmoil within them. This makes them very restless, and anxious. They are the kind of people who get very worked up over the slightest thing. This also accounts for their fastidiousness. They talk in an excited manner, and their actions are hurried and very restless. They feel that something has to be done, but don't know what.

One situation could be a wife/mother in a house where other members of the family do not bother about anything. The house is a mess, and nothing works. The husband and child are enjoying themselves, and do not care about the house. So the wife becomes disappointed and excitable. She becomes excited over small things. A Graphites lady may have a Calc carb or Sulphur husband.

Weeping is an expression and the Graphites patient is much better by expressing her emotions. Until she has expressed these emotions, she will be excited, anxious, apprehensive, sad, despairing and despondent. Her mind will be all shaky and vibrating and the moment she can express it, it becomes smooth and calm. This can happen when she comes for her consultation. She seems so excited when she describes her problem, and after she has finished, she is so relaxed. (Homeopathic Links, 1992)

To further understand the Graphites patient, it can be helpful to consider similar remedies:

- Pulsatilla: weepy, changeable, irresolution;
- Ferrum: tiredness, fatness, coldness, flushing;
- Calc carb: chilly and obese, but Graphites has an aversion to mental work and Calc carb will persevere.

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