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Home for the holidays - Homeopathy can encourage harmony - December 2003

by Amy Rothenberg ND, DHANP

*Homeopathy
Today*



Homeopathy has much to offer before, during, and after the holidays. Whether it's treating the jitters and anxiety that can precede a family gathering, addressing an illness that arises during this busy season, or working with emotional issues that the holidays may bring up, we can use homeopathic remedies to good effect.

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Before the holidays

Most homeopaths treat patients all year long, but it is around the holidays that things can become urgent. I may hear from a worried young mother just days before her family is to board an airplane to visit relatives. "Jenny has a _____ [Fill in the blank: sore throat, earache, stomach flu, etc.] Is there anything we can do?"

Or for those staying home, the added responsibilities of finding gifts, cleaning the house, cooking and baking, and visiting relatives and friends require extra hours that most people don't have in their days. The time leading up to the holidays can cause stress, and sometimes we and our children respond by getting ill. Homeopathy can help!

Emotional stress of going home

For many, it is lovely to "go home" for the holidays, but for some it is a time of tremendous upheaval and family dysfunction. Returning to the fold may bring up unresolved issues from childhood, strong memories, feelings of love, and family discord. And while most families seek to create traditions and meaningful experiences for all, the reality can fall short of expectations; disappointment and depression can ensue. Homeopathy can help!

For my patients who are aware of a pattern of family difficulty, we always schedule an in-office visit sometime in early-to-mid December. We spend time together and I prescribe a constitutional remedy based on their overall state, that is, what's going on mentally, emotionally, and physically. I do this to help shore them up for the time when they'll be with family. If this patient can be their healthiest, most balanced self, they will be less likely to fall back into the negative patterns of old.

I also help them troubleshoot likely problems. For instance, if there is wide disparity in family incomes creating issues with gift-giving, I might encourage my patient to organize a gift exchange so that each person only brings one present for one person, with a monetary limit. Or if there is history of one relative drinking too much and acting inappropriately as the evenings get late, I advise my patient to say ahead of time that her family will need to leave by a certain hour. If there is constant conflict among children and resentment about childcare duties, I might suggest that my patient offer to find an appropriate childcare provider for the afternoon or evening.

The point here is that some conflict and disharmony can lead to productive dialogue and the resolution of family issues, but too much can color the event to such a point that it is downright unpleasant. Some conflicts can be sidestepped by planning ahead so that the positive elements of family gatherings can be optimized.

I will often schedule a follow-up visit with these patients in January to see how things have gone, to offer support, and to reassess how the homeopathic

remedy acted and whether a prescription change is needed. There is often much to report and a shifting of symptoms.

Exacerbations of chronic conditions

Most people with a chronic health complaint are worse with stress, and holiday stress is no exception. If I know that a patient's asthma attacks or migraines are likely to worsen with travel or family gatherings, I might send them off with a dose of the homeopathic remedy I know works for them, along with dietary or botanical medicine recommendations. This way, patients have a few tools at hand to help prevent a relapse and a few more in the bag, should they fall ill.

First-aid on the road

The stress of travel, different time zones, exposure to a different germ pool, variation in diet often with more sugars and refined foods, and less regular exercise—along with the good and bad stresses of being with extended family and friends—make the holiday traveler more susceptible to acute illnesses. I recommend that my patients travel with their homeopathic first-aid kits and self-care books to help select the correct remedy. Using homeopathy early to head off an incipient cold, cough, sore throat, or sinus congestion can go a long way toward preventing worse problems.

Along with the homeopathic kit, I also recommend that patients travel with the following supplements and botanical medicines. I add or subtract items based on what I know of how the individual or family tends to get ill. This can all fit in a small travel pouch.

Vitamin C. As a preventive or as a treatment for upper respiratory tract infections: colds, coughs, sinusitis, etc.

Vitamin E. During any illness to help support proper immune function. The "pearls" can also be pierced and the oil applied to small burns or skin rashes.

Acidophilus. To help treat a disordered digestive tract and reestablish healthy flora in the case of diarrhea or vomiting.

Activated charcoal (capsules and tablets). The capsules can be used if there is diarrhea or vomiting, to help absorb the germs causing the problem. The tablets can be sucked to help absorb germs in cases of cold sore or sore throat.

Goldenseal tincture. Used in water as a gargle for sore throat or cold sore. Used extremely diluted, 3--4 drops in an eyecup, to wash the eye in conjunctivitis.

Herbal cough syrup. With soothing herbs such as slippery elm, elecampane root, and wild cherry bark to help with dry or irritating coughs.

Bromelain. An enzyme derived from pineapple, taken in capsule form as a general anti-inflammatory for musculoskeletal soreness. It can also be used to thin mucus in the case of sinusitis or congestion in the ear.

Small hot water bottle and single use ice packs. Used as needed!

Family time

My own family looks forward to the holiday season to reconnect with family and friends and to spend more open-ended time together. The cold and dark winters of New England encourage time around the woodstove, music-making, game playing, candle dipping, and cookie baking. We take advantage of our more open schedule to enjoy each other's company and to reflect on the year gone by—and dream about the one to come.

About the author:

Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, practices in Enfield, Connecticut. She teaches for the National Center for Homeopathy and the New England School of Homeopathy. Information on their upcoming Two-Year Course can be found at www.nesh.com.

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