



Life stages



Homeopathy for the 20s and 30s

by Bob Leckridge

A major 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.

A few years ago there was a very entertaining series on TV called *Thirty Something*, a kind of soap opera, which ran for several months. It focussed on the lives of a group of American friends who were in their early 30s, following them through their life crises of relationships, family and work. It was both funny and sad at times. It's a popular subject; there are many other films, books and programmes which deal with the main issues which we encounter at this stage in our lives.

In fact, these two decades are crucially significant in most people's lives. Why should this period of life be particularly associated with crises? As we've seen in the series so far, the one certainty in life is change. We are all constantly changing and the circumstances of our lives are always changing. Human beings are incredibly adaptable animals. We cope with change. In fact, more than just cope with it, we grow and develop because of change. It's our capacity to adapt, to recognise and respond to changes in our physical, emotional and social environments which enables us to grow and to mature. This phase of life is a crucial phase of maturity. It's where we are faced with independence, and both the freedoms and the responsibilities that come with this.

So, one of the reasons why this is a time of crises is that it is a time of change, but the other, equally important reason is that it is a time of conflict. By conflict, I particularly mean inner conflict. It's not only a time of struggle between freedom and responsibility but it's a time of

struggle between the competing pressures of home and work. It's a time of readjustment in relationships where there are conflicting needs, especially the need to be separate and the need to be attached to another person.

One of the key principles of homeopathy is that people become healthy through the effective working of the systems of self-repair and self-healing. These functions are part of the person's adaptive processes. So from a homeopathic perspective, the adaptation to the changes during this phase of life are seen to be completely normal and natural. We can expect change and we can expect to adapt.

However, all change and all adaptive pressure is a kind of stress. Stress is an overused word these days, but in a strictly biological sense it means anything which applies adaptive pressure to the organism. This can be good or bad. We tend to use the word stress only when we mean something bad, but it is good stress which helps us to grow, which stimulates our motivation and so on. Another characteristic of healthy organisms is the ability to attain conditions of balance and harmony. So, one of the goals of these stresses is to achieve some new point of balance between conflicting needs and demands.

Another key principle of homeopathy is that everyone is different. Our uniqueness is more important than the characteristics we share with others. Every one of the homeopathic drugs available is described in books called *materia medica*. These descriptions reveal

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the common and typical patterns of coping with challenges and stresses, of engaging with the world and of adapting to change. How a particular individual responds to a specific situation will be different from how another person might deal with a similar incident.

The commonest patterns of response are described in the homeopathic drugs known as "polychrests". A polychrest is a medicine with many uses. It has many uses because it represents a common pattern.

Let's consider some possible homeopathic drugs which might help us through some of these challenges.

responsibility for his own home. The man who needs Bryonia will appear to be mainly focussed on work. He is a good businessman and works very hard. In fact, he's the kind of person who talks about work all the time.

If you listen carefully you will hear a consistent theme, which underpins his work-fascination: money. This man has financial insecurity. He needs to work in order to make a living. This is often the kind of person who will be most drawn to jobs like accounting, banking and finance. They are not the most ambitious people though. You don't hear them always talking about wealth. It's not that they are

debt. The first mortgage is therefore a big pressure for them, yet it is also very important for them because despite this apparent focus on work and business they are happiest at home. Home to them is a nice house which represents a solid expression of security. You could imagine that they will have a tapestry hanging on the wall somewhere, which says "Home Sweet Home".

However, although home is where they feel most secure, they are acutely aware that home wouldn't exist without the means to provide for it, which is what gives them their focus on work. Try to get the Bryonia man to go on holiday. It isn't easy! They would prefer to take their holidays at home. In fact, they may often say that their ideal holiday is to spend it in their house or garden and may justify this by saying that because of work they have little opportunity to enjoy their home. Under pressure from these conflicting but connected drives they develop a kind of stiffness or rigidity. They like to have routines and methods but they can get quite stuck. This tendency to rigidity coupled with their lack of ambition means they are the employees who tend to get stuck for years in a low or middle level at work, getting passed over promotion and only being troubled by that if they feel financially insecure at their present level.

It's interesting to see what the homeopathic materia medica teaches us about the kinds of illnesses which different people develop. In the Bryonia patient, who has this tendency to rigidity, it is fascinating to see that their most common symptoms are of stiffness and of pains which make it difficult to move. This might be joint pains or neuralgias or chest problems, but the common feature is this pain which forces the patient to stay very still.



The work/home conflict

The homeopathic drug Bryonia, is a commonly indicated one for men who are dealing with a home/work conflict in a particular way. When a young man marries and sets up home, it is often at the same time as when he is in the early stages of his career. So he is faced with two parallel sets of challenges – settling into regular work and taking

greedy. They need to work in order to make a living. Security for them is built on a strong foundation of financial security. So these are the people who will be making sensible, practical decisions about finance, young men who are already aware of the need for pension planning and who are keen to find the best vehicles for saving.

They are uncomfortable with

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The career/motherhood conflict

What about women? They might find themselves with just these very pressures and need Bryonia just as a man might but a very typical woman's remedy for conflict between the demands of work and home is Cimicifuga.

This is commonly indicated in successful businesswomen. They are successful because they are ambitious, they have good energy levels and they are very able. These are the women who rise up quickly through the company to become important executives or partners in the firm. Their particular issue though is the one of human bonds.

Although they are very ambitious and are typically high achievers, they want to enjoy the bonds between human beings. The most powerful bond for many women is the maternal one so these are women who might find themselves trying to deal with the competing drives to succeed at work and to experience the joy of motherhood. These are conflicting drives for them however and the place where they experience this most acutely is in this feeling about bonding.

Although part of them wants to experience the connectedness, the belonging and the bond between mother and baby, they also experience the bond as a kind of entrapment. In fact, they might even talk about feeling as if they are engaged or bound by wires. This might appear as a very physical symptom with a chest or abdominal pain which has this character – that it makes the woman feel as if she is engaged. The issue is that the bond while desired is also experienced as a limit to freedom. You can imagine that this is not an uncommon situation for a young, bright ambitious woman to find herself in.

Cimicifuga in such a situation may enable her to find the way to cope more happily with these conflicting demands.

The higher/lower drives conflict

In these two decades of life the developmental issues cover the full breadth of physical, emotional and spiritual life. Sometimes these areas conflict and this causes problems. We have just considered the busy, bright, successful female executive in the Cimicifuga description above.

There is another type of conflict which can underpin the problems of a different type of busy, bright executive. This is where the woman in question has strong sexual urges but finds such a thing quite unacceptable because of her strong religious or moral beliefs. It's as if her "higher" calling to be the best she can be in the world clashes with the "lower" calling of her libido. She deals with this by trying to throw herself into work and this results in her being a high achiever.

However you can't really transform one energy or drive very easily into another so this tension begins to bring about anxious feelings along with guilty ones and this state of anxiety and energy drives her faster and faster so she becomes hurried in everything she does. Physically she is likely to develop symptoms which relate to feelings of something inside trying to push outwards. This is experienced in a downward direction with feelings of heaviness in the pelvis (what are described as "bearing down" sensations) and in an upward direction with breathlessness and palpitations which feel as if they are being brought on by pressure upwards from the abdomen. This state is typical of the remedy, *Lilium tigrinum*, which may help, not only the physical symptoms, but also the inner conflict.

The demands of work/babies conflict

In an earlier article we considered the problems of the sleepless child. Sleeplessness and disturbed sleep, however, are pretty much



normal to a certain extent in the early years. Almost every parent experiences disturbed nights in the first few months of a new baby's life. I can remember discovering that the local radio station broadcast a programme between two and five in the morning thanks to my daughter! (I also learned that if you push a pram around a room in a figure of eight pattern you didn't get as dizzy as you did following a circular route!) This sleeplessness can undermine health. There are many remedies which may be of use in this situation but there is one particular remedy which is good for the health problems caused by this sleeplessness especially in people who are also experiencing strong work demands related to their own ambitious nature. It's *Cocculus*.

The person who needs this remedy is typically a very caring, very dedicated person with good energy levels. They are frequently people who have jobs in the caring professions, like nursing. However, they aren't just nurses, ►

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they are strong people who are likely to rise quickly to positions of power and responsibility. They are more typically the nursing sisters or nurse managers. They have very high standards at work and pay close attention to details and won't tolerate contradiction.

As you might imagine, these are people who can easily overdo things. They are particularly sensitive to loss of sleep where the loss of sleep is caused by them having to give care or attention to others. There is a rather old-fashioned word for this – night-watching. This is a common state in a young parent who has this kind of character. They then get ill and become anxious about their health. Strangely, when they are unwell they experience a lot of their symptoms as a kind of emptiness or hollowness. This might be experienced either in their body (hollowness in the chest or the abdomen for example) or in their mind (an empty feeling in the mind). They also feel quite queasy and giddy when they are over-tired or unwell.

Family conflict

Living with someone brings its own challenges and when children are added in to the equation the chances for conflict are multiplied many times. People have different needs in relationships and they will express these needs in their own particular ways. This can work, but at times, it can also be problematic.

There is a whole group of remedies which share a way of coping in families. They are known as the "kali" salts. The

commonest ones are Kali carbonicum and Kali bichromium. They all share a common theme of needing to be in control of the family members in order for them to feel secure in themselves.

Maybe we don't see this kind of structure as commonly now but it is the classical Victorian type of family where everyone knows their place and what is expected of them. The powerful parent treats their family as possessions and they don't cope well with children who act unpredictably. They like a family to run according to laid down rules. The Kali bichromium person especially likes regular routines. They want to eat their meals at the same hour every day and they like the family routines to be predictable. These are people who are fascinated with shiny surfaces and like to keep things nicely polished and gleaming. The Kali carbonicum person is the classic patriarch: the father who rules the family with a rod of iron. Other family members may fear this father and he deals with conflict by insisting on adherence to his rules.

I've seen a number of patients who have presented with urticaria – nettle rash – which comes with lots of itch. There are women with this condition who describe

themselves as people-pleasers and who are very sensitive to violence to the extent that they will switch off violent programmes on the TV. They get angry quickly, but their anger blows over quickly. The women who fit this picture also have issues with their partners, which they are angry about but they find it hard to resolve the conflict. They don't like conflict and they don't like to get angry. These women need a remedy called Magnesium sulphuricum.

As you might imagine there are many other patterns of coping and dealing with conflict within the family and homeopathic treatments can often help to ease the partners into finding solutions.

The 20s and the 30s are times of change and every individual will attempt to adapt in their own unique way. In the homeopathic materia medica we can read a variety of ways in which people attempt to cope. The polychrests mentioned in this article describe some of the more common patterns we encounter. An understanding of these patterns can help us to understand ourselves and our friends and family better and, on occasions, to help find homeopathic drugs which will enhance particular ways of coping.

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. 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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