



# Life stages



## Homeopathy for the 40s and 50s

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.

Throughout this series I've focussed on transition and change as well as considering some of the specific diseases which occur quite commonly at each stage of life. Homeopathy is based on a whole life approach where the aim of treatment is to try to stimulate the body's healing system to do its job. The healing system is not only the body's defence, it is also the capacity to deal with change. In biological terms this is known as "adaptation". Any changes in the circumstances of our lives, whether physical, emotional or social, demand that we respond by adapting. Sometimes this is a process of regaining our balance, or of holding steady in the face of some stress, but at other times the adaptive response is more about growth or development. This can result in life seeming to be never the same again. The changes can be so substantial, and the responses of the individual can be so deep and so wide-ranging, that really the word "transformation" is the most appropriate one to describe what has happened. We tend to think of transformation as being a positive phenomenon, but while it may be fundamentally positive, it can also occur in the midst of painful or disabling symptoms which transform someone's experience of life in anything but positive ways.

#### **Homeopathy and chronic illness**

Dr Hahnemann noticed in his practice that many of his patients who had recovered quickly from acute diseases did not seem to make such a full recovery from other

illnesses. This led him to develop a whole theory about chronic illnesses. His theories were quite advanced at the time, but since his day we have discovered much more about human health and disease so we have to adapt his original insights. For example we now know about the role of micro-organisms (eg viruses and bacteria) in causing acute infectious disease and we have discovered the genetic codes which are the main causes of some chronic diseases. We have also developed our knowledge of the nurture side of the "nature versus nurture" debate. What I mean is that we have increased our understanding of the environmental and social causes of chronic disease.

Most chronic diseases are more common in the second half of life, so people in their 40s and their 50s are the very people most likely to have the experiences of developing and dealing with many different kinds of chronic problems including heart disease, cancer, arthritic diseases and diabetes.

The vast majority of patients referred to the NHS homeopathic hospitals are referred with chronic diseases. This is partly because almost all of the drug treatments and surgical operations available for patients with chronic diseases don't actually address the issues of healing or coping. They either just suppress symptoms or remove diseased tissue. As homeopathy works by stimulating the body's natural system of self-repair and self-recovery then a well-chosen remedy has great potential to improve a patient's quality of life. This can be ►

# Life stages



experienced as an increase in energy, in well-being and as a reduction in disturbing or distressing symptoms. It is not uncommon for a patient with a condition like multiple sclerosis to say after homeopathic treatment that their loss of sensation, or their leg weakness, or whatever, is no better but that they now feel much more able to cope with their illness or disability. Alongside feelings of well-being and good energy this really is what health is about. In this context it would be reasonable to say that whatever the chronic disease it is worthwhile including homeopathic treatment.

However, some chronic diseases are due to natural ageing of cells and tissues and others are caused by an inability of the body to produce particular important hormones. Two examples of this latter state are diabetes and hypothyroidism. These are both common problems at this stage of life and both involve failure of particular organs to produce necessary body chemicals. In the case of diabetes, there is a failure of insulin production from the pancreas and in the case of hypothyroidism there is a failure of thyroxine production from the thyroid gland. Homeopathic remedies cannot produce what is not there so in such diseases the best which can be hoped for is that the organs which are not working properly are stimulated to work better and/or the person can be helped to cope with the change.

A homeopathic remedy might improve both energy levels and the amount of well-being experienced by a patient with such a problem, but they will probably still need to take artificial supplements of some kind – insulin injections or sugar-lowering drugs in the case of diabetes and thyroxine in the case of hypothyroidism. It's a sad fact that simply achieving "normal" levels of chemicals like insulin or thyroxine will not necessarily be all a patient needs

to feel well, so homeopathy can in fact produce a better outcome for such patients than can be achieved through drugs alone.

## The menopause

A particular hormonal problem at this time of life only affects women and that is menopause. Really, the menopause should not be considered to be a disease. It is a natural part of a woman's life. Trying to not have a menopause by taking artificial hormones in the form of HRT for the rest of a woman's life has been shown to cause many problems, including increasing the risk of several life-threatening diseases. However, the time around the menopause is undoubtedly one of the most significant periods of fundamental change in a woman's life. Some women seem to sail through without any major difficulty but others experience profoundly unpleasant symptoms. It isn't clear why experiences are so different. For some it is menopausal flushes which are the main problem, but for many there is a more fundamental issue.

Trinny and Susannah in *What Not To Wear* focussed on menopausal women in one of their TV shows. It was an extremely moving programme and showed very clearly that for many women this period of life feels like a time where they disappear from the world. This is due to a whole host of reasons including loss of libido, tiredness, loss of roles in life (with the children growing up and leaving home) and a profound loss of sense of self as an attractive, sexy woman. It is a challenge to the very essence of personal identity as a woman. In the TV programme the problem was tackled at the level of care about personal appearance. This isn't a trivialisation because there is no doubt that giving up on these issues is often a feature of depression.

However, it is likely that a

deeper level of help is needed – changing your clothes and your make-up just isn't going to be enough! The homeopathic approach is ideal in this situation as it takes into consideration every aspect of a woman's experience, from flushings to low self-esteem. There are no simple homeopathic solutions to this problem however. There isn't any "homeopathic HRT". Instead a homeopathic doctor will try to find a constitutional remedy for each woman.

Nevertheless let me just say a little about some of the features of commonly indicated remedies for this problem. Sulphur, as a homeopathic drug, is a medicine for people who are hot. They often stick their feet out of their beds at night because they feel so hot. They tend to feel worse in hot conditions and get flushes of heat when moving from a cooler atmosphere into a warmer one. They are usually restless people but they are not very focussed. They tend to become quite disorganised, untidy and even messy. These are often people who choose to wear bright colours which clash with each other. You can spot them at the bus stop! Their physical problems often include eczema and bowel upsets like chronic diarrhoea. Indeed, there is a strange significant symptom which often indicates the need for Sulphur – diarrhoea driving the patient out of bed quickly in the morning.

There are several other homeopathic medicines prepared from salts of Sulphur and these too can be commonly indicated at this time. Sulphuric acid, for example, includes the features of flushing seen in Sulphur itself but more severely. These are people who are always hurrying here there and everywhere and they complain that other people around them are not moving quickly enough. They do everything quickly – eating, writing, and talking. They tend to

## 6: Homeopathy for the 40s and 50s

have lots of tremulousness and are also very irritable.

Natrum sulphuricum, another sulphur salt, is a medicine which can be indicated for the depressed woman with flushes. In fact, the woman who needs this may be profoundly depressed, even to the point of having suicidal thoughts. These are patients who also have trouble with asthma and they are especially sensitive to damp conditions, often saying they feel much worse when the weather turns bad.

The loss of oestrogen around the menopause also increases the risk of brittle bones (osteoporosis) but there are a number of things a woman can do to reduce the likelihood of this. Not putting too much stress on the bones by not getting overweight is a good help, as is regular, moderate exercise; stopping smoking is another big plus. In addition, a good constitutional homeopathic medicine can result in an optimising of the whole body's function so, theoretically, it can also help to maintain the health of the bones.

### Gall bladder and heart problems

At medical school, students are taught that the people most likely to get gallstones are those who are "female, fat, fertile and forty". This is a bit cruel but it highlights the people most likely to have gall bladder trouble – women in their forties who have had children and who are overweight. There are homeopathic medicines which can both help to relieve the pains of gallstones and even help the body to expel them. The medicine, *Calcarea carbonica*, which we looked at in a previous article has these characteristic features, especially when the patient also has the typical symptoms of an underactive thyroid gland. More specific treatments include *Berberis* which is a great remedy for the typical sharp, burning,



well-localised colicky gall bladder pain.

Another of the major diseases which turn up at this point in life is heart disease. Angina is the name given to the tight chest pains caused by the heart muscle being deprived of oxygen (usually because of hardening of the arteries). If you develop this you will definitely need to visit your GP but if you have already been given a diagnosis of angina, and the doctors have decided to try to control it with pills, then you may find the additional use of homeopathic medicines to be beneficial. This is not a situation where you can self-prescribe but included in the list of homeopathic medicines which are most commonly used to try to treat angina pains are *Cactus grandiflora* which has the typical tight chest pain described as being like a band of iron constricting the chest, often accompanied by palpitations, and *Latrodectus mactans* which is indicated where there is pain radiating down the left arm and accompanied by coldness of the hands.

### Cancer

This has become the dread disease

of our times. Yet it really isn't helpful to think of cancer as being a single disease. There are two things to bear in mind with cancers. Firstly, cancers of different types behave differently and, secondly, every individual is different. One of the worst things a doctor can do is to tell a patient they have a certain number of months or years to live. No doctor can predict this accurately for any particular patient. It is guesswork based on the experiences of others.

Patients with cancer can benefit from homeopathic treatment in a number of ways. It can be helpful at any stage of the disease to reduce painful or disturbing symptoms. Homeopathic medicines are non-toxic and don't cause troublesome side-effects the way that orthodox drugs do. Again, at any stage it is useful to boost the body's healing system resulting in improved energy levels and improvements in well-being. Thirdly, homeopathic medicines can reduce the unpleasant side-effects of powerful treatments like radiotherapy and chemotherapy. However, there is yet another, I believe even more significant use for homeopathy in the treatment of cancer and that's in the growth of self-understanding and awareness which comes about by being enabled to tell your full story to someone who understands. Just that experience itself can improve a person's quality of life. It's this point which I've made repeatedly throughout this series. Homeopathy is about more than just some medicines for some symptoms. It is a way to improve self-awareness, and therefore, self-understanding. This is what brings about the transformations in life which can occur in the course of homeopathic treatment.

### Major challenges

A characteristic of the typical challenges of this life-stage is loss; it's about endings. It may be because a man or a woman is

# Life stages



*When offspring leave home some parents suffer from the “empty nest” syndrome*

confronted with what is known as an “empty nest” where the children have grown up and no longer need the kind of parenting they had needed over the best part of twenty years. Or it may be a man’s or a woman’s realisation that they are never going to have a child. The time has passed. This is, of course, much more likely to be an issue for a woman than a man because a man may still father a child later in life. On the other hand, it may be the end of a professional or working life. Many people have experienced redundancy or enforced early retirement in their 50s and, particularly if it feels as if this was

indeed enforced rather than chosen, it can precipitate depression. These losses in relation to family or work are particularly significant because of their impact on self-identity. We each have a sense of self, constructed from various different sources.

The roles we play in life are especially important in defining the way we see ourselves. Traditionally it has been said that a woman defines herself through her relationships and a man defines himself through his work. This is still true of older people but society has changed so much over the last 50 years that this view is now out-dated. However, the areas of relationship and work are still the most important ones for both men and women in defining how they see themselves. This is why a loss of sense of self as a parent, potential parent, or as a professional person has such a huge impact. There is no doubt that these times demand major changes and so it is no surprise that under such stress people have increased vulnerability to a whole host of diseases. It is also no surprise that depression is common at this time.

Depression is often a complex condition and most people need professional help. There is a

multitude of homeopathic medicines which may be indicated in the treatment of depression but a couple of common ones which cover this sense of emptiness and loss of self or loss of personal power are Aurum metallicum and Stannum metallicum – that is, gold and tin. Aurum is a medicine which is indicated for black, deep, even suicidal depressions. This kind of depression comes from a loss of personal power and is most likely to occur in those who lose positions of power. Stannum is often indicated when there has been a loss of status and is accompanied by feelings of emptiness and hollowness which may be experienced in the chest or in the head and may also be accompanied by loss of power in the legs.

You will see, even from these small descriptions, that every homeopathic medicine has its unique and specific features and indications. This is the beauty of homeopathy. It is based on the characteristics and the situations of an individual’s experience and it treats not just part of a person but the whole person. This means the effects can be wide-ranging and profound. These medicines can help you to transform your life.

**If you are going to use any of the medicines mentioned in this series, 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.**

**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.**