



## Homeopathy for teenagers

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.

When children go to school they begin to learn how to interact with other children. There are great pressures in the playground to conform and to be included in the group. Throughout primary schooling, this socialisation is a strong feature. Once children grow into their teenage years, they become aware of quite other pressures too. At various stages in life, human beings ask themselves the question "Who am I?" This is often associated with the birthdays which end in "0" – especially later in life, where 30, 40 and 50 are seen as "significant" birthdays sometimes associated with the "mid-life crises". The seeds of these crises lie in the teenage years because this is the time of life when we begin to ask profound questions.

#### Teenage tensions

Not only are teenagers subject to pressures to belong, in the same way as they experienced when younger, but they are beginning to become aware of the need to know themselves as individual and unique. This is a real tension. How can you affirm your uniqueness and yet at the same time not be rejected by your peers?

Happily, one of the ways emerges naturally because all the teenager's friends are experiencing exactly the same tension. This leads to them identifying with sub-groups of teenagers with common interests and common ways of behaving. We can see this in apparently paradoxical ways. For example, one particular style adopted by some teenagers these days is that of the "Goth". If you see one of these kids in the street with their parents, you wonder if the

child has been parachuted down into this family unit from outer space! With their black clothes, chains, heavy make-up, they just don't look like they fit! They do look quite unique. However, somewhere in town, there will be a corner, a street or a park where these children gather. When you see a crowd of twenty or thirty "Goths", they don't look so unique any more – they all look the same! This is a good example of how teenagers are beginning to identify more with other people of the same age as themselves than they are with their families.

Developing these new connections and trying to separate themselves to some extent from their families is the basis of much of the disturbance, which occurs at this time in life. In addition, families, or more specifically, parents, represent authority and control. As teenagers try to separate themselves from the family controls they can become overtly rebellious. In fact, a general rebellion against authority of all kinds is quite common during these years. This rebelliousness can have quite a destructive or even violent quality in some teenagers.

However, these teens are still children too. They still need to love and be loved and they still have plenty of playfulness and curiosity. In fact, just as children are often more imaginative than adults, so we see that teenagers have active imaginations and can often be highly idealistic.

At best then, this is a time of first love, of intense, passionate relationships, a time of high ideals and of a drive to discover new ways of experiencing life. At worst, the

# Life stages



tensions produce self-doubt, fed by broken relationships, lost loves and disappointments, which lead to melancholy and even depressive or self-destructive experiences.

## Hormonal changes

These issues are not, however, the only ones facing teenagers. We change all the time. Our bodies are always changing. We see this most obviously in the first couple of decades of life where little children quickly grow taller. Not only are their bodies growing and maturing

difficulties and emotional/behavioural problems.

## Homeopathic intervention

In the conditions, which are strongly physical, like acne and menstrual problems, homeopathic medicines can help stimulate the healing system to deal with the hormonal changes naturally and so reduce the harmful impacts on the body that produce these problems. In addition, however, reading the narratives of some "constitutional" homeopathic medicines which are

attitude this difference is not generally perceived by others as a bad thing. If these children are struck with self-doubt then things begin to change dramatically. They start to close down and withdraw.

What kinds of events might produce this change? The grief of the loss of a loved one – not necessarily a death in the family, but the loss of the first love. Moving house, particularly to another area altogether where they have to make new connections and new friends. At this time they can become significantly homesick. Or it might be a physical event, like a head injury. This closing down state is typified by moroseness, grumpiness and ill-temper.

They lose all their motivation and say that nothing interests them any more. Expressions of sympathy and attention just seem to make them worse by making them more aware of their distress. This state is accompanied by a slowing up, seen not only in apathy, but in a slowing of their speech. They are reluctant to talk, speak slowly, if at all, and even seem to think slowly. Throughout this they maintain that strong sense of individuality and express that through dress. Often what they wear, others find strange, or "inappropriate". They can become quite obsessed with death and dying and withdraw into their own imaginary worlds.

## Cina

Cina children are bright, imaginative and fun when well, but we rarely see them in this state. When they become unwell they develop a real dissatisfaction with everything, which is expressed through what are typically described as "ugly" moods. When upset, rather than withdrawing like the Helleborus children, these children make a noise about it. They complain and they complain loudly. They are in a very uncomfortable state where they don't want to be ignored but they don't want attention either – really,



Mike Broczone

however, so are their personalities. We watch our children develop new skills week by week throughout the first years of life, and this development continues apace throughout the teens. However, there is the addition of a crucially important element at this time – the sex hormones. Puberty brings about enormous changes in the shape of these children's bodies. Boys' voices "break" and they begin to develop body and facial hair. Girls begin to menstruate and to develop breasts and body hair. In addition the surging hormones impact on the skin and many teenagers experience the sufferings of the plague of acne.

Amongst the common health problems in these years, therefore, are skin complaints, menstrual

commonly indicated at this time will not only help the teenager holistically but will help his or her parents to understand them better. A "constitutional" medicine is one, which closely matches a wide range of features in the patient's experience. Not just particular symptoms, which are being experienced but sensitivities and ways of coping also. Here are some of the more common ones. Maybe you will recognise a teenager you know in one of these descriptions.

## Helleborus

These are children who are often described as "unusually compassionate". This can make them stand out from others and even seem a bit eccentric. They have their own ways of doing things, but because of their caring

## 4: Homeopathy for teenagers

there is no pleasing them!

These are children who can develop tics and spasms, or even epileptic type “absences”. They, too, have active imaginations and can become quite disturbed, especially at night, when they are active dreamers and will talk or even scream in their sleep.

### **Tuberculinum**

In previous articles we have seen that Tuberculinum can be a common remedy in young children and even toddlers and here in the teenage years it is also common. The typical teenager who needs this remedy is restless, stubborn and very rebellious. They can be quite malicious, or even destructive when they are angry. They are continuously kicking against any idea of authority and yet are highly idealistic, even romantic, in their thinking.

These are the kids who identify with political revolutionaries, and who, in times past, would put up posters of Che Guevara and Chairman Mao on their bedroom walls – not so common these days! They might identify with other “rebels”. The punk rock movement attracted a lot of these kids (although it also attracted many other teenagers who needed quite different homeopathic medicines!). Despite their anger and their restlessness, they still have many fears and these might be quite specific – dogs, thunderstorms, darkness, for example.

### **Skin problems**

Acne is common to both boys and girls but is more common in the boys. This is because it is particularly provoked by the circulating testosterone levels, which make the skin more greasy and oily. The pores become blocked and infected and so we see the full range of spots, from black-heads, to red swellings, to pus-filled eruptions, which cause teenagers such distress. In more severe cases, there can be many spots over the face, the forehead, the chest and



the back, and the most severe ones are quite destructive of the skin leaving deep pits and scars. Whilst even in its milder forms acne can cause great distress, in its most severe forms it leaves permanent scarring.

The orthodox treatments for acne centre around the use of antibiotics, used either in short courses to fight the larger, more painful lesions, or in low doses over longer periods of time to treat chronic acne. The homeopathic approach is to try and stimulate the person’s own healing system to reduce the sensitivity in the skin to the circulating hormones. One good way to do this is to give them their “constitutional” medicine but this is very difficult to work out if you are the parent. It is best to have a full consultation with a homeopathic doctor if you want to take this approach. However, there are some common medicines, which may be indicated on the basis of some of the features of the acne itself.

For treatment of the bigger spots, which might even be small abscesses, Hepar sulph can be indicated. This is where a lot of pus has gathered, the patient feels chilly and irritable, and there is considerable swelling and tenderness. They might find that putting a hot cloth against the sore bit helps. At an earlier stage to this, where there is just redness, heat and swelling but no pus yet, then

Belladonna might be more useful, especially if the patient is agitated, restless and fevered.

When we considered the problems of children in an earlier article, we looked at Sulphur as a common medicine for the restless, inquisitive, messy and disorganised child. Certainly, many teenagers’ rooms look like “Sulphur rooms”! They are messy and chaotic and as they develop many passing fancies with a disposition to collect things, their rooms are really full of “stuff”! These tend to be hot, sweaty teenagers who love nothing better than fast food, like burgers, pizzas and chips. They often have quite bad skin with many red, itchy and hot patches and spots.

Silica is a common remedy in acne. The Silica child tends to be a bit chilly, sensitive, shy and very concerned to do well at school. Indeed, a fear of failing can cause many problems for these patients around examination times. Their skin is unhealthy and injuries, scratches and inflammation easily become infected with the infections grumbling on for long periods of time. These skin problems are not as dramatic as in the Hepar sulph or the Sulphur states but seem to be more chronic. These are also sweaty kids with particularly offensive foot sweats.

Kali bromatum is another common acne medicine. This is more commonly indicated in some ►

# Life stages



of the more severe cases of acne, especially with lots of itchy lesions, which are worse before each period. These children are often low in energy, sleepy and worried about not getting on well at school. They are afraid they are not as clever as their friends.

## Period pains

In the early years of a girl's periods, there are commonly problems with painful periods and with very irregular periods. In most cases, both of these problems settle down in time and the body adjusts naturally. However, in many girls the problem is severe enough to cause them to lose time off school and to generally make their lives miserable. Almost the only treatments on offer from the doctor are painkillers and, sometimes, the oral contraceptive pill. Both of these approaches use drugs on a frequent, or even semi-permanent basis, and most people would really rather try to find a more natural solution. Here homeopathy has a role to play, in trying to stimulate the natural regulatory systems and resolve the problems without drugs.

One of the most commonly indicated homeopathic medicines for period pain (dysmenorrhoea) is Magnesium phosphoricum (Mag phos). This is indicated when there is severe colicky abdominal pain which forces the girl to bend over or curl up so she can press on the sore part and where the pains are relieved by holding a hot water bottle against the affected area. This is quite common in girls who are sensitive, in fact, maybe even oversensitive to things. They are easily disturbed by scary or violent things on TV and are oversensitive to pain.

Another medicine for dysmenorrhoea is Chamomilla. This is indicated when the girl become extremely irritable with the pain, crying out and shouting out and demanding attention. It is a common remedy for the teething infant, but is often forgotten as a medicine for these girls with their dysmenorrhoea.

Lachesis is often indicated for period pains which are worse in the run up to the period each month but which go away very quickly whenever the bleeding begins. It is indicated in girls who have fiery tempers and who react increasingly aggressively as the period approaches. They are also likely to complain of feeling bloated and have swollen painful breasts in the premenstrual days. Everything instantly gets better when the period begins.

Pulsatilla is a good medicine for girls whose periods tend to be very erratic, sometimes coming too early, sometimes too late. The pattern is constantly changing. This is really a key feature of Pulsatilla – the variability of the symptoms. They become very weepy and emotional before their periods and need to have company and sympathy to feel well. These girls are typically quite shy, although they are very sociable and respond well to the attentions of their friends and family.

Another homeopathic medicine, which can be useful at this time in a girl's life is China. This is a good remedy for girls who get really exhausted after a heavy period. Their periods tend to be heavier than average and are really quite debilitating so that they often lose time off school because they are just so exhausted. In this state they feel very physically weak and can be quite tremulous. This is an oversensitive state, and they are oversensitive to lights, to noise and even to smells.

There are, of course, many other problems, which can be experienced by teenagers, but these descriptions of teenage behavioural changes and some medicines for acne and period problems are all very common patterns and I expect you will recognise at least one of them in a teenager you know.

These can be very difficult and challenging years, but your teenager needs two things from you more than anything else: to know that you still love them (no matter what!) and to feel secure – home can be a safe haven in these troubled times. You might be amazed how your children change when they enter their teens, but the vast majority emerges at the other end of the teens as balanced, and very likeable young adults!

**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.**

**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.**