

Tired all the time?

Jonathan Hardy discusses the role of homeopathy in helping to treat ME

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) has received increasing attention in recent years. It is also known as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and is sometimes diagnosed as post-viral fatigue syndrome (PVFS). It is thought that there are up to 240,000 people with ME in the UK. It can affect men, women and children of all ages and backgrounds, although it is more common in females. Someone is most likely to develop the illness between the early twenties and mid-forties.

As with most illnesses, ME affects people in different ways. The most common symptom is overwhelming and persistent fatigue or tiredness. Fatigue after exertion may occur immediately, or it may begin a day or two later and this delayed reaction is a distinctive feature of ME and should help in diagnosis. Pain is another common symptom. It can be felt as aching in the muscles or joints. Pins and needles, muscle twitching and headaches or migraine are other common symptoms.

Patients often feel generally unwell, and this malaise is similar to flu. There may be a sore throat with or without swollen glands. Sleep is often disturbed: there may be a

need to sleep excessively, or insomnia. Sleep may be unrefreshing or broken. Sleep reversal is sometimes seen, for example, not being able to sleep until 4.00 or 5.00am and then sleeping through till noon.

Mental functioning can be disturbed, with difficulty concentrating, poor memory and difficulty in organising thought and expressing oneself. Some patients are often found to have abnormalities in the nervous system, including part of the brain called the hypothalamus which regulates sleep, temperature control and appetite. There may be difficulties with balance and vertigo.

What causes ME?

Around two-thirds of cases of ME are triggered by an obvious viral infection, including influenza, glandular fever, viral meningitis, viral hepatitis and less commonly infection with bacteria or other organisms. The problem is that the patient does not recover in the normal way. Physical injury or trauma, such as an accident or operation, also occasionally appear to be triggers. Many people with ME report an increase in stress in their lives around the time they first became ill.

Diagnosis

There is no medical test to confirm a diagnosis of ME. The condition is usually diagnosed when tests have ruled out other conditions. Some individuals are concerned when they receive a diagnosis of ME. For others it can be a relief at least to be given a name to their complaint. It can help them to come to terms with it and to have a measure of control over their illness.

The homeopathic approach

As with any case homeopathically, it is always essential to individualise. What we mean by this is finding the individual remedy in a specific case. In the homeopathic repertory it is interesting that the symptom "Weakness" is the biggest section! There are many hundreds of remedies in it. Also all the symptoms I have listed above are fairly common symptoms, and therefore not very helpful in pinpointing one particular remedy out of many. So how do we do it?

Remedy families

One device for understanding cases which is gaining increasing attention at the moment is to look at



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remedies in groups and families. By knowing the common themes in a particular group of remedies we can help to narrow down the field from the thousands of remedies to choose from, to a much smaller group, before finally finding the individual remedy. One group of remedies which is especially useful in very exhausted patients is the acids. Recent insights show that the main theme of acids is a struggle followed by collapse, in other words, exertion followed by exhaustion. In patients needing these remedies one will see the theme of constant struggle and effort and then at some point the person has become so exhausted that a small set-back or stress is enough to lead to a state of collapse. This theme of struggle and collapse is clearly expressed in certain symptoms which are common to all the acids: Hurry, Industriousness, Fear of failure, Over-activity – and then on the other hand, Fatigue and Apathy and Exhaustion. The point is that this struggle and effort will be made in a particular direction in that person's life and this specific direction depends on which acid the patient needs.

Phosphoric acid

Phosphoric acid is the acid formed from the element Phosphorous. One of the main issues in the life of a Phosphorous person is the desire for love and care. Phosphorous people tend to be very affectionate, friendly and sympathetic and so the effort in a Phosphoric acid person is a constant effort to be caring and to receive the reciprocation of that love and affection. It is well-known that Phosphoric acid patients very often fall into a state of ill-health as a result of emotional traumas such as grief, disappointed love, home-sickness or receiving bad news.

A 13 year-old girl was brought to me with ME. She was a very good athlete, but was both physically tired and unable to attend school through complete mental exhaustion. She had been ill for several years. On close enquiry I learned that her parents had divorced when she was seven years old. She was a very sensitive, mild and reserved child – all characteristics of the Phosphoric acid temperament. The mother said, “She really hasn't been affected by the divorce. She never talks about it, I'm sure it has nothing to do with her illness.” Looking into the child's eyes, I sensed

a deep but unexpressed grief. She was given doses of Phosphoric acid in a high potency every two to three weeks and has made a complete recovery.

A 14 year-old boy was brought to me in a state of complete apathy and indolence. He was a sensitive young man who loved nothing more than playing his guitar. Speaking to him alone, it transpired that he had been rejected by a girl with whom he had fallen in love. He said, “If she doesn't want me then life means nothing to me. I'll never love anyone else.” Phosphoric acid patients can have a strongly sentimental and nostalgic nature. With one course of this remedy he was back to his old cheerful and active self. He later told me that there was another girl whom he was really interested in and he had forgotten his old passion!

A woman in her 40s came to me complaining of depression. On questioning she admitted to being completely exhausted and having no energy or interest in life at all. It turned out that her best friend was dying of cancer and my patient was closely involved in caring for her. She had few other friends, and this friendship was very deep and long-





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standing. The state of apathy or indifference is very fundamental to the Phosphoric acid state and this remedy quickly restored her to her old self.

In these three cases you could say the “effort” is in the direction of loving and caring. The “collapse” is when the person feels the love is not returned or the love will be lost through bereavement or separation. The collapse in Phosphoricum acidum therefore is on an emotional level.



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Picric acid

This remedy shows a collapse on a mental level. The common causation is mental exertion and therefore it is a good medicine for students who are exhausted from too much study – I can imagine hordes of teenagers clamouring for this remedy! There is also muscular debility with a tired, heavy feeling all over the body but

the mental symptoms predominate with lack of will-power and disinclination to work. There is a dread of failing the exam and little interest in surroundings.

Muriatic acid

This is the homeopathic name for the remedy prepared from hydrochloric acid. This is the acid formed by the combination of hydrogen and chlorine. The theme in chlorine patients (Muriaticums in homeopathic terms) is of being disappointed and hurt and the effort which is made to avoid that happening is caring and nurturing for others. In the collapsed state a Muriatic acid patient is especially exhausted on a physical level. We read in Allen’s *Encyclopaedia*: “Great debility: as soon as he sits down his eyes close, lower jaw hangs down, slides down in bed”.

An interesting Muriatic acid case of mine was a young woman with an extremely dark complexion, black hair and dark eyes, which are characteristic of the remedy. She suffered with chilblains and painful mouth ulcers, both of which are well-known symptoms of the remedy. The pain in the ulcers was stinging and burning, which is a characteristic sensation in the acids. She did very well with the remedy – the chilblains and ulcers cleared up and she no longer felt the cold.

Sulphuric acid

Sulphuric acid is a very interesting remedy. The theme of hurry and effort is very apparent. The patient is fretful and impatient and must do everything in a great hurry. They are hurried in eating, in moving, in occupation, while walking and while writing and can be very impatient about trivial

matters. They cannot bear to be stuck in a traffic jam! In the collapsed state there is extreme mental dejection. The patient feels disheartened, morose and unable to work. On a physical level, strength can seem to sink rapidly and there is a desire for stimulants.

A Sulphuric acid patient of mine was a motor mechanic who ran a very successful business providing classic cars and other vehicles for the film industry. The trouble was the fumes from the engines made him ill! After he had been working in the environment of the exhaust for a while he would get terrible headaches and exhaustion. It is interesting that Sulphuric acid is one of the major constituents of car exhausts. Homeopathic Sulphuric acid helped with his symptoms.

An exhausted world

Sulphuric acid is the cause of acid rain – the acidity in the environment caused by the burning of fossil fuels. This really is a symptom of the environment as a whole becoming exhausted through over-activity. We are burning up our resources on an environmental level too fast, and as a result the natural systems in our environment are collapsing. We should learn from the homeopathic insights into the cycle of over-activity followed by collapse in individuals that we cannot carry on like this on a global scale without producing dire consequences.

Homeopathy aims to produce balance and stability in the constitution of the individual. If we can regain balance in our activities in the world then the environment will naturally restore itself to health.