

Homeopathic & Naturopathic Treatment of Headaches

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Most everyone commonly experiences Cephalgia or headaches at some time during their life, though some people experience them more often than others. Headaches are not themselves a disease but rather an indication that there is a disturbance elsewhere. They are caused by an increase in pressure inside the skull from a dilation or contraction of the blood vessels. This pressure then stimulates the nerve endings resulting in pain. Headache pains of similar etiology will have some symptoms in common but have some symptoms that are experienced differently by different people. Most headaches are caused by conditions that are not considered life threatening but are often a reflection of some chronic disturbance that the person suffers from. In most cases, the person knows what has caused the headache. A headache that is persistent, extremely painful, or awakes the person at night and is not relieved by any self treatments or over-the-counter medications warrants an additional work up as it may be due to a more serious underlying disease such as subarachnoid hemorrhage, obstructive hydrocephalis, subdural hematoma, or tumor.

Headaches can be classified into several different categories based primarily on patient history. Congestive or migraine headaches are often preceded by a warning or prodrome, are very painful, and may last for several days. Tension or nervous headaches are often associated with stressful or emotional situations. Sick headaches are head pain caused by other conditions somewhere else in the body such as from a congested liver, poor kidney function, or digestive disturbance which leads to a buildup of toxins. Hormonal headaches are associated with endocrine system imbalances such as premenstrual syndrome, hypothyroidism, or diabetes.

The value in classifying headaches into the different categories is that the homeopathic practitioner is able to narrow down the possible remedy choices as certain remedy pictures correspond primarily to certain types of headaches. Thorough case taking is therefore necessary to determine how the condition affects the individual person. Elicitation of any strange, rare, or peculiar symptoms helps to delineate the remedy from the usual symptoms that most patients present with. From this information the practitioner can select the simillimum for the case which may be a lesional, miasmatic, fundamental, or a constitutional remedy.

As an example, most patients will complain of throbbing or pounding pains that are located over the entire head. When questioned further, the practitioner may be able to find out that the headache is located primarily in the temples, has the sensation as if there

is a band around the head, and seems to affect the eyes in that they feel droopy and drowsy and are difficult to focus. These symptoms strongly suggest Gelsemium as the remedy as opposed to Lycopodium that has aching in the temples but none of the other symptoms. Gelsemium may be more of a fundamental or lesional prescription in this case, the patient being Lycopodium constitutionally.

Management of acute and chronic headaches using homeopathic medicines is in my opinion more of an art form than a science. By this I mean that in allopathic medicine very little is done to determine the underlying cause of the disturbance, and in the process, many different drugs may be used. The patient may respond somewhat or not at all to the various drugs before success is achieved. Success when using prescription medications is more or less defined as an alleviation of symptoms. While symptoms are relieved, and the patient feels better, the underlying cause has not been addressed and the pattern will repeat itself over and over. With homeopathic medicine however the practitioner must possess a working knowledge of the materia medica and an understanding of the patho-physiology of the disease process as they elicit symptoms from the patient. When combined with a treatment plan utilizing the principles of naturopathic medicine such as Tolle Causam, Tolle Totum, Docere, Do No Harm, and stimulation of the Vis Medicatrix Naturae, our patients not only obtain relief from symptoms but an opportunity for cure.

Headaches classified as to possible etiology such as hormonal, stress induced, congestive, or sick headache mentioned previously, helps you to more easily delineate the correct remedy, but also allows you to consider other therapies as well. For example, if the person is suffering from a sick headache and is chronically constipated, has digestive problems, and passes a lot of gas, chances are that they need some work on their liver. Providing additional nutritional support helps the remedy to work better and the patient to recover faster.

In the absence of response, or a partial response to a well-indicated prescription, further work ups are warranted. Additionally, a further work up probably needs to be done for persistent headaches that are refractory to therapy.

In some cases there may be more than one type of headache present and a different remedy may be needed for each. It is not unusual for the clinician to have a patient tell them that, yes they do have headaches, but they are different and come on at different times. I most often see this with women, as they will have problems with migraines as well as headaches around their menstrual periods. These often will require different prescriptions such as Cyclamen or Pulsatilla for the headaches associated with menses, while the migraines may require Nux vomica. When confronted with a situation such as this, I have found that there is probably a considerable miasmatic over tone to the case and a miasmatic remedy will be needed to break the cycle freeing the patient. In some cases, utilization of one of the bowel nosodes may also provide relief. The bowel nosodes seem to work best when a well indicated remedy that is alleviating symptoms doesn't seem to hold for very long or completely cure the case. They will often allow the healing reaction of the well-indicated remedy to go to completion following their administration.

Consider that if the person responds to the remedy in every way except for the headache, there is some sort of irreversible pathology present or an allergy that has not been addressed. Periodically you will have cases that respond in every way except for the

presenting chief complaint. This is true not only for headaches but for other presenting complaints as well. When this happens, looking into other possible etiologies is probably in order. For example, if the patient presents with periodic stomach upsets and occipital headaches and you prescribe for them both and the stomach complaints get better but the headaches still persist, consider that they may be different entities. The headaches may in fact be due to a tumor or a cervical subluxation that needs addressing.

A neurological examination or work up is in order if one hasn't been done and the patient's headaches do not respond to therapy. I mention this because while the greater majority of patients presenting with headaches will simply have a headache, headaches can be the result of some underlying pathology such as a tumor, hematoma or aneurysm that a more thorough exam will uncover.

While I utilize homeopathic medicine as my primary therapy, I incorporate naturopathic therapies as well. A recent case is that of a 56-year-old male who presented with adult ADHD and chronic migraine headaches. Both conditions had been present since his teens and he had been on Imitrex and Tylenol for the past 10 years for them. He reported taking upwards of 15 to 20 Tylenol per day and often started his morning with coffee and two Tylenol's. Among other things he had been alternating constipation and loose stools, chronic gas and bloating, bruised easily, complained of being extremely irritable, and was unable to focus for any appreciable period of time. His ADHD was interfering with his ability to conduct his business resulting in it being on the verge of bankruptcy. He had tried antidepressants as well as Adderall, which in his case made his symptoms worse.

After taking the case my assessment was that there was probably a genetic predisposition to developing migraines as there was a family history and that the ADHD was probably present since childhood but unrecognized. I suspected that he had an allergic component to the migraines as there was a correlation with certain foods. I also felt that his liver function was compromised because of the inordinate amount of Tylenol usage and was concerned about his kidney function as well. Lab studies showed no appreciable liver or kidney pathology and physical and neurological exam findings were unremarkable.

He was placed on a specific diet based upon his blood type which was A positive and secretor positive. I mention the patient's blood type and secretor status because they are of significance as there is a higher incidence of migraine headaches in blood type A individuals who are non-secretors than any other blood type. Having this information allows me to introduce certain dietary restrictions, and to assess his prognosis. In my experience, migraine headaches in non-secretors tend to be much more severe, prolonged and debilitating than in secretors due to the inability of non-secretors to modulate inflammatory reactions well.

We also started him on lipotropic factors to help normalize liver function and he was prescribed homeopathic Lycopodium 30c for the ADHD and migraines. Additionally we gave him an herbal formula that contained 5-HTP, Kava, Rhodiola, Ginkgo, and Hypericum as well as B vitamins and amino acids to provide the "nutrient soil" to help the remedy work better and speed the healing process.

After an initial aggravation that lasted about a week, he reported that he was sleeping better, had less migraine episodes, and those were of decreased severity. He also

was finding that he was better able to focus on tasks and was less irritable. The patient continues to improve and his migraines are less frequent and of decreasing severity.

To prescribe homeopathic medicines for the treatment of migraines does not necessarily require that the practitioner undergo years of training. A number of easy to use reference books are available that can help the practitioner arrive at the correct remedy. As homeopathy, along with naturopathic therapies have proven to be exceedingly successful for the treatment of headaches, it provides an excellent opportunity to help patients overcome this debilitating condition.

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