

Multiple Sclerosis

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Naturopathic physicians view multiple sclerosis (MS) as they do other disease processes, that is, from a wholistic perspective. The illness is seen as a combination of physical, mental/emotional and in some cases, spiritual aspects. A naturopathic physician will use a variety of diagnostic methods to evaluate the patient. These range from conventional testing, such as laboratory studies, magnetic resonance imaging and ultra sound examination, to the less well known pulse and tongue diagnostic procedures. By using a combination of diagnostic modalities, as well as listening to what the person has to say about his or her illness, the physician is better able to assess the disordered internal environment.

Given 10 individuals with MS, the physician is presented with a set of symptoms which have a commonalty and some which are unique to certain individuals. In the Naturopathic view, these symptoms are the body's way of telling the affected person that something is wrong and that it is attempting to correct the imbalance imposed on it by the disease. The pattern of symptoms experienced by the patient becomes even more important than the diagnosis, as it allows the physician to select the medicines with which to treat the person. This is based upon the vitalist tradition of medicine which was first expounded by Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine.

Prior to the early part of this century, MS was not recognized as a specific disease entity except in rare cases. The incidence of the disease, especially in industrialized nations, has risen in the past 50 years to its present level. Conventional medicine generally views MS as being an incurable disease characterized by periods of decline and remission.

Naturopathic physicians do not see the disease process as being incurable or one of inevitable decline, as they believe in the healing power of nature, or the *vis medicatrix naturae*. What is important to understand is that the healing ability of the body begins early at the onset of the disease before any destruction of the nervous system or pathology takes place. This is why early diagnosis is often missed by conventional medicine as it relies primarily on the presence of diagnostic markers such as the presence of oligoclonal proteins in the spinal fluid, a poor flicker-fusion response or changes on an MRI. These changes are not seen until there is a considerable progression of the disease.

Because any symptom is seen as an attempt by the body to correct itself, MS may be treated early, allowing for a greater rate of success and recovery. In my experience,

even patients who are in the advanced stages will benefit from natural therapeutics as they act in harmony with the normal body healing processes.

Naturopathic physicians may use a variety of therapeutic modalities ranging from conventional drug therapy, to diet and nutrition, homeopathy, physical medicine, acupuncture, and the use of plants or botanical medicine while treating the whole person, not necessarily the "disease".

Diet:

Naturopathic physicians have long held that most of the chronic degenerative disease of our modern era are diet related. The higher incidences of multiple sclerosis parallel increased rates of cancer, heart disease and arthritis, as well as other chronic degenerative diseases, and all of these coincide with the introduction of high fat, high refined sugar and processed foods which have become the standard diet of most Americans. There has been a considerable body of research which bears this out, most notably that of Francis Pottenger, M. D., Weston Price, DDS and Roy Swank, M. D..

One of the cornerstones of treatment for multiple sclerosis is dietary. Roy Swank M. D. and his colleagues have shown that diets low in fats cause the illness to go into remission and the symptoms to diminish. Further, in following patients over a period of 35 years, he has shown that those who follow this diet have lower disease progression rates than those who do not. Most significantly, it has been shown that many patients are able to lead normal lives with just dietary manipulation alone.

My own experience with patients bears this out. I not only use the Swank Diet for MS but also combine it with a diet based upon the patient's blood type and secretor status. Not only is this combination highly beneficial for MS patients, but I have found it to be of benefit for other chronic degenerative illness as well. The MS patient begins to experience changes in the disease process within 4 to 6 weeks of starting the diet, often sooner. The longer the person continues with the diet the more improvement occurs. Even persons with severe manifestations of the illness receive some benefit. Inevitably, at some time in the process, the person will go off the dietary recommendations to see it is really helping or they are just going through a period of remission. In every case symptoms begin to return within a short period of time and will resolve when the patient begins to follow the proper diet again. That some individuals are more susceptible to high fat diets than others has been shown by D'Adamo through the testing of red blood cell groupings to determine their genetic susceptibility.

The naturopathic physician is highly trained in clinical nutrition and possesses the knowledge of the therapeutic nutritional effects of different foods, vitamins and minerals

in the treatment of disease. To this end the physician may choose to test the patients blood for genetic factors which determine the type of diet best suited for the patient or do allergy testing to determine what agent is contributing to the illness.

Homeopathy:

Homeopathic medicine is a system of medicine practiced by doctors all over the world. Naturopathic physicians are prominent in the revival of this healing science, which uses like substances to cure like diseases. This means that substances which will cause symptoms similar to those of multiple sclerosis, if taken in toxic doses will, in the homeopathic dose, produce a cure or an amelioration of those symptoms.

Homeopathic medicine works well because it is not necessary to have a diagnosis in order to prescribe. Rather, what is most important is the symptom pattern presented by the patient as it is an individual manifestation of the disease. This is important because everyone who has MS will have some symptoms in common, but because we are unique individuals, we will have symptoms unique to our own illness. An example would be someone who is experiencing difficulty with reading because they can not focus their eyes for very long and becomes fatigued easily. These symptoms may be common to many MS sufferers. However, in one person they may be brought on by becoming over heated while in another they may occur only in the evening. Using these individual differences, the skilled physician can make the determination between the different medicines which are known to cure the affliction.

Because symptoms are seen as an attempt by the body to heal itself, the action of the medicine stimulates the patient's vital force to complete the healing reaction. While taking the medicine, the patient's body is better able to overcome the restrictions placed upon it by the disease. Because of this stimulating action and the eventual return to a higher level of health and well being, the medicines do not have to be taken for prolonged periods of time, but only until the healing process is complete.

By example, a 23 year old female who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis became aggravated by heat, had considerable difficulty focusing her eyes and experienced considerable daily fatigue. Each of the general symptoms were elicited so that the medication could be individualized. It became clear taking her history, that the condition had come on following the death of a close friend for whom she had never been able to experience grief. This was considered significant as many illnesses often follow periods of unexpressed emotions. (Swank and his colleagues made the same observation during their 35 year study.) She was given the homeopathic medicine Natrum muriaticum and within 3 weeks reported feeling more energy and a better ability to focus her eyes.

Within 6 months of treatment her previous level of health had been restored and 10 years later she is still symptom free.

Most naturopathic physicians are highly trained in the use of homeopathic medicine but as mentioned earlier, so are a number of other physicians. In my opinion, homeopathy is also a cornerstone of treatment for multiple sclerosis along with diet. I have seen the greatest success with these 2 therapies.

Herbal Medicine:

Naturopathic physicians have been trained in the art and science of prescribing medications derived from plant sources. The majority of prescription drugs are derived as well from plants but are often altered and used as single constituents. What makes herbal medicine unique is that plants have evolved along with human beings and have been used as non-toxic medications for centuries.

If there is any problem with herbal medicines it is that unless one knows how to prescribe them, they may not be effective. Herbal medications should be prescribed based on the symptoms that the person presents rather than for the name of the disease. Herbal medications are much more effective at relieving the patient's symptoms when prescribed in this manner. When prescribed, the medicines act with the body's own innate healing mechanism to restore balance and ultimately allows healing to occur.

What's nice about plant or herbal medicines is that because they are derived from the whole plant they are considerably less toxic to the body. The plant medicine has evolved to work in harmony with the normal body processes rather than taking over its function as many drug therapies do. Because of this herbal medicines may be taken for longer periods of time without the side effects so often experienced with drugs.

Hydrotherapy:

Hydrotherapy was very popular around the turn of the century until the mid 1950's, then began a slow decline. Its decline came about not because it was an ineffective therapy, but because it could not compete with the new "miracle drugs". It continues to be part of naturopathic therapy because it works so well, has few, if any side effects, and can be done at home by the patient, making it very cost effective.

Hydrotherapy works because it does several things needed by the MS patient. First, it increases oxygenation in the blood. Because of the higher fat content of the blood in these patients, less oxygen is delivered to the tissues. This is due to a slowing down or stagnation of the circulation which is especially important in the midbrain, spinal cord and cerebellum where most of the lesions of MS develop. These areas require a

continued, unimpeded flow of blood to function optimally. Secondly, hydrotherapy increases the white blood cell count which is needed for healing to occur. Thirdly, the process of using hot and cold applications promotes repair of tissue damaged by the disease, thus helping to reverse the damage to the delicate tissues. Lastly, hydrotherapy increases the rate of cellular metabolism causing it to function optimally.

Acupuncture:

Naturopathic physicians also may perform acupuncture to treat the symptoms of MS. Acupuncture works on the premise that there's a stagnant flow of energy throughout the body. This stagnant flow of energy contributes to the symptoms experienced by the MS patient and to the formation of plaques found in the myelin sheath of the nerves.

Acupuncture is also a vitalistic therapy in that it stimulates the body's own healing power. This therapy may be used by itself or used in conjunction with any number of other therapies such as hydrotherapy, nutrition or herbal medicine.

Bee Venom Therapy:

Bee venom therapy has been around since the time of Hippocrates, if not for longer. Use of bee venom to treat disease is found in the ancient writings of Babylon, Egypt, Rome, Greece, Persia, and Ethiopia. Bee venom therapy was touted in ancient writings to cure just about every illness, not only arthritis and MS.

Bee venom has been shown to contain substances that help the myelin sheath of the damaged nerve regenerate, reduce inflammation, and promote healing. A series of injections are undertaken with increasing amounts of bee venom, as the patient is able to adapt. Along with diet and homeopathic medicine, I have found bee venom therapy to facilitate the healing process, often shortening the healing time.

The following case study is an example of how a naturopathic physician could treat a patient with multiple sclerosis. As with any physician the type of therapy depends upon the physician's skill and level of experience.

The patient was a 48-year-old female who has had gradually developing symptoms over a period of 5 years but had recently experienced a worsening of them in the past 3 months. At this time she was extremely fatigued, had difficulty maintaining her balance while walking and was developing a slurring of speech. At times she experienced severe headaches. She was able to do very little physical activity and it was increasingly difficult for her to keep up with her normal activities of daily living. Additionally she

complained of becoming more socially isolated, and was suffering from depression because she had been so ill.

Her diet analysis showed that she was eating high amounts of red meats, had a high total fat content and was low in vegetables and fiber. She was also found to be a blood type A and a non-secretor. As blood type A people should be primarily vegetarians, the high meat and fat diet was contributing to her illness. Because of her increasing fatigue she was unable to exercise much, and when she did, often felt worse. She had been previously diagnosed with multiple sclerosis but was told that there was no treatment for the condition.

She was placed on the Swank and Blood Type A Diet and begun on homeopathic Pulsatilla as it covered the totality of her symptoms. Hydrotherapy treatments consisting of alternating hot and cold packs to her spine and cerebellum were ordered once daily. At the first follow up visit one month later she reported a decrease in the amount of fatigue as well as a greater ability to walk without falling. Additionally, she reported that her speech was improving. There had been only one headache to report and that was of less severity. Most importantly however, was the fact that she was no longer as depressed, as she was beginning to feel that she could overcome the disease process.

Subsequent visits and a series of 10 bee venom therapy sessions showed a gradual and continued improvement until the patient returned to a level of normal function. She did experience a period of exacerbation of the disease when she decided to go off the diet for a period of one month to see if it really was doing something. As some of her symptoms became worse she quickly resumed the diet and was able to regain what she had lost.

Naturopathic medicine offers much in the way of relief and possible cure for the person afflicted with multiple sclerosis. In my experience and other physicians who treat patients with natural medicine, even someone in the advanced stages of the illness will experience some degree of relief. The treatment however, takes commitment by the patient in order to become well. This is simply because it is the patient's who cure themselves, not the physician. Because of this, those who have a good mental attitude about over coming the disease will progress better than those who do not. I consider this the fourth cornerstone of the treatment for multiple sclerosis and one of its most important aspects.

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