



## PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# Homeopathy

This information describes the common uses of Homeopathy, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

## What is it?

Although there is some evidence that homeopathy may benefit individuals with chronic conditions, data are limited and more research is needed.

Homeopathy was developed more than 200 years ago. It is based on the Law of Similars, or “like cures like.” A patient experiencing a certain symptom is given a medicine containing low doses of plant extracts, animal extracts, or minerals that, when taken in normal amounts, usually cause that symptom. Homeopathy continues to be popular in India and many European countries.

Clinical studies have been conducted to evaluate benefits of homeopathy, but data are limited and results are inconclusive. More research is needed.

## What are the potential uses and benefits?

- **To treat allergies**

Studies have produced conflicting results. Although observational studies suggest benefit, some reviews found data to be of limited quality.

- **To treat anxiety or depression**

Data are limited and results are mixed.

- **To treat inflammatory conditions**

Studies have produced conflicting results. Although observational studies suggest benefit, some reviews found data to be of limited quality.

- **To treat infections**

Data from clinical trials are inconclusive or do not support this use. The Canadian Paediatric Society states that homeopathic treatments have not been proven effective against infectious disease.

- **To treat cancer treatment side effects**

A few studies suggest potential benefit with various add-on homeopathy treatments for quality of life, well-being, fatigue, or dermatitis, but additional studies are needed.

## What are the side effects?

- *Homeopathic aggravations*, described as a short-term worsening of symptoms before improvement occurs, are commonly reported in trials.
- Some newer homeopathic products may actually contain ingredients in higher doses, which has raised concerns about other potential adverse effects or drug interactions.

### Case reports – Adults

- **Acute liver inflammation:** In a patient who took *Lycopodium similiaplex* to relieve insomnia.
- **Liver toxicity:** In a 45-year-old woman, associated with a complex homeopathic mixture provided by a Lyme specialist to treat symptoms that persisted despite IV antibiotics. The agent in the mixture most likely to cause this toxicity was thought to be [artemisinin](#).
- **Allergic reactions and intoxication:** Following the use of some homeopathic products.
- **Toxic levels of iodine:** In a 55-year-old woman, caused by long-term

homeopathic use of Oligolito Iodium and Thyroidinum to treat Graves' disease.

- **Seizures, neuromuscular hyperexcitability:** In a previously neurologically stable patient with Parkinson's disease after using a homeopathic medication that contained alcohol, which was thought to interact with the medication escitalopram.
- **Blue-green skin discoloration:** In a middle-aged man, with the ingestion of homeopathic medicine as the probable cause. Blood copper levels were also high and returned to normal after product discontinuation.
- **(Topical) Vaginal scarring, deformity, and pain:** In a 33-year-old woman caused by vaginal application of a black salve preparation to self-treat cervical dysplasia, an abnormal growth of cells.
- **(Topical) Sudden glaucoma:** In a 55-year-old woman, with eye redness, swelling, tearing, and foreign-body sensation that worsened after use of over-the-counter homeopathic eyedrops containing belladonna.
- **(Injection) Potential for false positive reading:** On PET/CT evaluation of response to chemotherapy, in a 29-year-old woman with Hodgkin's lymphoma. An inflammatory reaction was attributed to homeopathic **mistletoe** injections prescribed by a naturopath, but might have been mistaken as new disease if not more carefully assessed. After product discontinuation, repeat scans over 4 months later were clear.

## Case reports – Pediatric

- **Infant seizures and other serious symptoms:** Attributed to homeopathic teething tablets and gels (see Warnings section).

# What else do I need to know?

## Patient Warnings:

- An FDA investigation found over 400 reports of adverse events in infants and children associated with homeopathic teething products filed over 6 years, including tremor, fever, shortness of breath, lethargy, sleepiness,

constipation, vomiting, agitation, irritability, and even death.

- In 2016, the US Food & Drug Administration issued a warning that homeopathic teething tablets and gels may pose risks to infants and children and that consumers should not use these products. Some homeopathic teething products tested were found to have elevated levels of belladonna, which is considered a poisonous plant .

### Do Not Take if:

You are taking **escitalopram**: Homeopathic medications that contain alcohol should be avoided, as there is a case report of neuromuscular side effects in a patient with Parkinson's disease after such use.

### Special Point:

- Premarket testing for safety or efficacy of OTC or prescription homeopathic medicines is not required in the US.
- Some homeopathic products may contain alcohol, which may interact with some medications.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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