

HOMEOPATHY: START HERE

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*For Peter and Elizabeth
who led me here*

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Even before pen came to paper or fingers to keyboard, hundreds of students helped me understand how to explain homeopathy and its principles. Insatiable and exacting, they held me to the highest standard of clarity. I hope I've done them justice here.

And from the very beginning of my work in homeopathy, the people whose stories appear here shared that most intimate aspect of human experience, their health journeys. I'm forever indebted to them for their trust and the privilege of accompanying them.

A NOTE BEFORE WE START

This is a book for people who want to expand their healthcare options.

This is not a book about how to avoid regular doctors. I would never, ever, ever abandon today's conventional medicine. Prompt diagnosis and expert care literally saved my life not long ago, and conventional medicines continue to save my life every day. This book could not have been written without regular medical care, because I wouldn't be around to write it.

At the same time, I've seen lives changed with homeopathy, including my own and those of my loved ones. The more tools we have, and the more we know about what each one can do, the better we can care for ourselves and others.

I'm grateful for all of it.

*This book does not provide medical advice.
The information in it is purely educational.*

INTRODUCTION

Why Homeopathy

Health care is one of the issues at the top of most people's list of concerns in the U.S. today. "The system is broken," people say from both within and outside it, and health insurance is only one piece of the problem. Parts of the country are losing hospitals and doctors because of soaring costs. The price of treatment and medicine puts them out of reach for many. Despite some of the most advanced technology in the world, our track record in some areas – labor and delivery, for instance – lags far behind many countries with fewer advantages. There are shining examples of promising discoveries in medical science, but the path to translating many of them into patient care is strewn with obstacles. Our population is aging and chronic disease is on the rise.

What if there were ways to relieve the strain on our health care system? What if we could nip acute ailments in the bud, lessen the severity of chronic diseases, reduce the need for medications and surgery, prevent diseases from progressing into dangerous territory, head off crisis and speed healing in injuries, ease pain without side effects, even address infections that are resistant to medicines? Then we could save our amazing technologies for the fewer cases that would still need them. Costs would go down and we'd have far fewer people living with compromises to their quality of life. Homeopathy can do all these things and more – safely, inexpensively and non-invasively.

It's time to think outside the box when we look for solutions both as individuals and as a nation. We can and should keep our standards high. We deserve safety, ease of access, affordability, quality control, and all the other hallmarks of excellent health care. We can have them by expanding our options in responsible ways.

Homeopathy is one modality that's poised to fill this need. It's highly professionalized and well regulated, and it offers a robust documented track record in both acute and chronic ailments. Used judiciously and with common sense as any modality should be, it could help our overburdened health care system reach its potential while opening the door to better health and well-being.

Homeopathy has a lot of practical advantages. Most people can easily learn how to use it at home to speed healing of minor injuries and acute ailments. It's extremely cost effective. It works quickly, has no side effects, and is safe for people of all ages and conditions. It can be used along with conventional medicine and there's no risk of drug interactions. In the hands of trained and credentialed professionals it can treat chronic and recurrent problems, even ones that don't respond well to conventional care.

But if you're interested in pursuing homeopathy, it can be challenging to find trustworthy information. There's a lot of misunderstanding out there, and unfortunately also a whole chorus of undependable voices clamoring for your attention. Even sources that are reliable on other topics may be completely off base about homeopathy. Homeopathy is radically different from the kinds of medicine we're used to, and it's easy to be misled by "experts" and "studies" that use the language and methods of one field to try to describe and judge another. Prejudice can also color the presentation of "facts," and falsehoods repeated often enough can come to seem true. You have to know a fair amount about homeopathy to be able to find trustworthy information. Even well-informed sources often skip over essential facts about what homeopathy is, how it works, what it can do, and how to make sound

Homeopathy: Start Here

choices about it. When I first got interested, I had to piece together my own understanding from prefaces to how-to books, which was okay except that it made it a lot harder than it needed to be. What's been missing is a dependable, comprehensive, experience-based overview that can help people make informed choices. That's where this book comes in.

Why homeopathy?

- Safe
- Cost effective
- No side effects
- No drug interactions
- No overdoses
- Natural sources
- No animal testing
- FDA regulated
- Over-the-counter

PART I

ALL THE BASICS



CHAPTER 1

What it Is

First we have to start with what it isn't.

When I tell people I'm a homeopath, there's always a moment when things shift. Sometimes it's distancing: they shut me out because they've heard something, no matter how inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading, that convinced them homeopathy is hogwash. Sometimes instead of distancing, it's a spark of connection: they declare they've used it, or someone they know has, and they think it's amazing. But either way, it often turns out that they think they know what it is but they don't. Unfortunately the term "homeopathy" has come into use with a wrong definition attached.

In a way it's great that people even recognize the word. Homeopathy is so little-known that every mention helps at least raise awareness that it exists. But when people use it with its common wrong definition – a catch-all term meaning any and all alternative therapies, or anything outside of conventional medicine, or anything "natural" – misunderstandings begin that can lead to ill-informed choices and judgments.

Homeopathy is one particular modality in complementary medicine. It's not herbal medicine, nutrition, flower essences, vitamin therapy, supplements, diet, essential oils, chiropractic, or acupuncture. It has its own methods, medicines, manufacturers, training programs, books, consumer and professional organizations, and certification standards. The

only thing it really has in common with all the modalities it's often grouped with is that it's not conventional medicine.

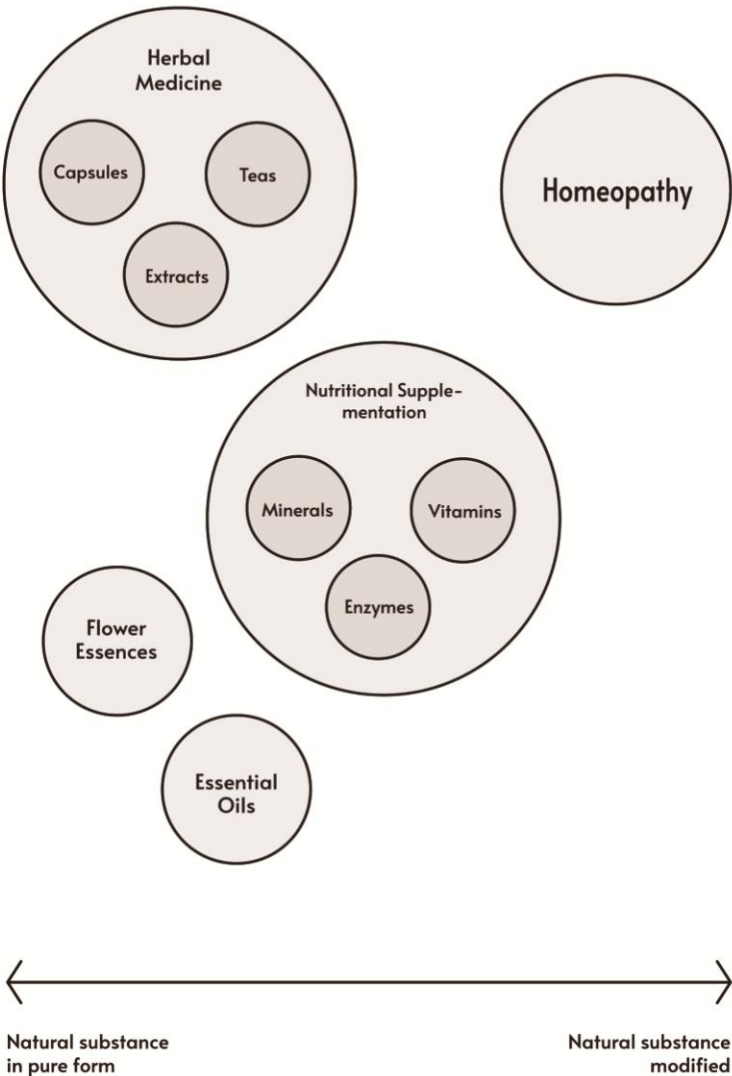
This misunderstanding leads to all kinds of problems beyond awkward conversation. If someone tells their neighbor they've had great results from homeopathy and the neighbor goes looking for what they understand to be a "homeopath" or a "homeopathic doctor," they might or might not get what they're expecting. When critical news reports use the term "homeopathic medicine" incorrectly, homeopathy gets a bad reputation from the mistakes of all kinds of people who have no connection with it. If a consumer advocate tries to educate a lobbyist or a legislator, they could easily be talking past each other so that nothing gets accomplished. This is certainly not to say that these other modalities are flawed in any way – they can be very powerful – but in the quest to use the right tool for every job, we have to know what the tools actually are.

Homeopathy is like some other "natural" modalities in that it uses medicines taken from nature. Each modality, however, has its own principles for how to use the products of nature, and each one modifies natural sources in its own way. Herbal medicine, for example, might dry a plant to create the basis for a tea, powder it to put it into a capsule, or soak it in liquid to create a tincture. Homeopathic medicines are made from natural sources modified in ways that are used only in homeopathy. This process is described in Chapter 3.

The diagram on the next page shows how homeopathy compares with certain other therapies. "Homeopathic" is not a synonym for "alternative" or "natural." Homeopathy is its own separate form of natural healing.

Examples of “Natural” Therapies

(Naturopathy includes these and more)



Classical Homeopathy

The best way to define homeopathy is through the story of how it began.

In 1790, in Germany, a doctor was translating a medical textbook about the medicines in use at the time, including theories about why they worked. Some of these theories struck the translator as implausible, and by the time he got to the section on quinine, he'd had enough.

Everyone recognized quinine as an effective cure for malaria, known then as intermittent fever. The translator, Samuel Hahnemann, had benefited from it himself years earlier when he'd had malaria. But the textbook writer said that quinine worked because of its "fortifying effect on the stomach," which Hahnemann hadn't experienced and which didn't make sense, given that there were plenty of other things that were just as strong and bitter and "fortifying" as quinine but none of them cured malaria.

As a medical doctor and researcher, Hahnemann wanted data. "By way of experiment," he wrote, he ordered some quinine and started taking it in measured doses twice a day the way he might have dosed a patient who had malaria. Very soon he developed symptoms – he was a healthy person taking a medicine, so in effect he was deliberately poisoning himself. He got tired and weak, his heart palpitated and his cheeks got flushed; he trembled, couldn't think, and felt tremendously anxious, and his bones felt numb and heavy. He was surprised to notice that these were symptoms that occurred in malaria. Every time he took a dose of quinine he suffered like this for a few hours, and when he stopped dosing he felt fine again. He

hadn't gotten malaria itself from the quinine; he'd just gotten a kind of temporary, artificial version of malaria. Satisfied that he'd proven the textbook writer wrong by finding another explanation, he wrote a note in his translation: "Substances which excite a kind of fever extinguish the types of intermittent fever."

Hahnemann had just made an enormous discovery, one that his research would later confirm had been noted throughout history. It took him years to understand it fully, but when he did, he phrased it in Latin: "*Similia similibus curentur*," literally "Let likes be cured by the things that are most like them" – eventually shortened to "Like cures like" or the Law of Similars. This is the first defining characteristic of homeopathy, which is named after it from the Greek for "same" and "suffering." **Homeopathy eases suffering in people who are ill by using the substance that would cause the same symptoms in a healthy person.**

Hahnemann was a meticulous investigator. Once his experimentation and research confirmed the Law of Similars, he developed it into a whole medical system. In the same way that he'd explored quinine, he tested other medicines, plants, minerals, and animal products to learn what symptoms or "artificial diseases" they produced in healthy people, and then he used them to address those symptoms in his medical practice. His clinical experience confirmed that the Law of Similars was a dependable way to help his patients.

With his experiment that day with quinine, Hahnemann established not only a new way to practice but also a new way to investigate the properties of medicines. Later he'd write that if you wanted to understand a medicine, it was nonsensical to test it on sick people, because then you don't see the medicine's pure action – you only see it mixed up with the symptoms of the illness. **The controlled administration of a medicine to healthy people to observe the changes it creates is known as proving** and is still the gold standard for how we learn the uses of homeopathic medicines. To this day, provings are done only

with healthy, informed and consenting adults, never on animals or people who are ill or compromised in any way.

But there was another discovery yet to come. Many medicines are toxic in large doses, so Hahnemann experimented with smaller and smaller amounts to see how little was needed to bring about a cure. This was opposite to the methods used in the standard “heroic medicine” of the time, where medicines were given all the way up to the patient’s limits of tolerance. “Bleeding” patients by bloodletting, or “sweating” them or “purging” them with vomiting and/or diarrhea were seen as ways to rid the body of illness. Hahnemann judged that kind of treatment to be exhausting and depleting to sick people who needed strength to heal. Seeking the smallest effective dose, he diluted his medicines, shaking them vigorously between steps of dilution, and found that they still worked. What’s more, to his surprise, they actually were more effective than when used full strength.

With the Law of Similars as the first defining aspect of homeopathy, the minimum dose and particularly this method of making medicines became the second. Hahnemann called it “dynamization” but “potentization” has become the more common term. **Potentized medicines are made by a series of steps of dilution and shaking.** Variations in the amount of dilution and the number of steps create different potencies of each medicine.

A third aspect of homeopathy on which Hahnemann insisted was the use of one single medicine at a time. He argued that when medicines are mixed together, not only is it impossible to tell what’s working, but the medicines could well interfere with each other. Moreover, his experiments had shown that each medicine evoked symptoms throughout the whole organism, with physical, mental, and emotional symptoms coming from the same medicine. If he identified the right medicine for the whole person, that one medicine could help them on every level of their being. **The use of one single remedy at a time is the third hallmark of classical homeopathy, the method established by Hahnemann.**

Hahnemann continued to practice homeopathy throughout his life, continually refining it based on his clinical experience but always reaffirming these fundamental principles. Physicians who studied with him took homeopathy to other countries, and though it has had many ups and downs over the years, it continues to be practiced around the world.

Classical homeopathy:

applies the Law of Similars,
uses potentized medicines, and
uses just one medicine at a time.