



## HOMEOPATHY

### Also Known As:

Homeopathic, Homeopathic Medicine, Homeopathic Remedies, Similar Disease.

### Scientific Name:

Homeopathy.

### People Use This For:

Homeopathic remedies are used both orally and topically for a range of conditions commonly including the common cold, swine flu, and flu (influenza), allergic rhinitis, asthma, conjunctivitis, diarrhea, cancer, dermatitis, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), anxiety, depression, fatigue and stress, migraine headache, tension headache, osteoarthritis, muscle pain, motion sickness, otitis media, and many other conditions.

### Safety:

**LIKELY SAFE** ...when used orally or topically and appropriately. Most homeopathic preparations contain little or no active ingredient. Therefore, it is unlikely that most homeopathic preparations have any beneficial or harmful effects.

**PREGNANCY AND LACTATION:** Insufficient reliable information available; avoid using. However, since most homeopathic preparations contain little or no active ingredient, it is unlikely that most homeopathic preparations would have any adverse effect on pregnancy or breast-feeding.

### Effectiveness:

#### **INSUFFICIENT RELIABLE EVIDENCE to RATE**

Most homeopathic preparations are so dilute that they have little or no active ingredient. Therefore, it is unlikely that these preparations have any pharmacological effect. However, while many clinical trials find no benefit compared to placebo, others, surprisingly, have found statistically significant benefits compared to placebo. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews have attempted to compile findings from multiple studies. But the results of these are also inconsistent. Some analyses find no benefit, while others find significant benefit (14486, 14491, 14492, 14494, 14495, 14496). The difference often appears to depend on which clinical studies the authors include in their analysis. When all evidence is pooled, regardless of study quality, findings often suggest that homeopathic preparations might offer some benefit (14486). But many homeopathic studies are of low methodological quality (14493). Analyses of higher quality studies suggest that homeopathy is not effective (14491). Likewise, analyses of studies published in peer-reviewed journals that are indexed in MEDLINE generally show homeopathy to be ineffective (14486). Homeopathy opponents suggest that this is because these journals are more likely to publish higher quality research. But proponents argue that these journals are more likely to publish negative studies due to an inherent bias against homeopathy.

Overall, there is a shortage of high-quality evidence on homeopathic products and research has produced inconsistent results. Consistent, reproducible, high-quality

clinical evidence is needed before homeopathic products should be recommended.

### **Mechanism of Action:**

Homeopathy was started over 200 years ago by the German physician Samuel Hahnemann. In 1796 Dr. Hahnemann presented the paper, "A new principle of healing." Hahnemann referred to this new principle as "homeopathy." The word comes from Greek and literally means "similar disease" (14486, 14487).

At the time Hahnemann developed homeopathy, medical treatment focused on balancing the 'humors' of the body. The medical treatments of the day were blood letting, purging, leeching, and other 'treatments' that often did more harm than good. Understandably, Hahnemann wanted a new, safer, subtler approach to therapy. Homeopathy is guided by several basic theories and principles:

**Law of similars.** Hahnemann believed that like cured like. If a substance in large amounts CAUSES a certain disease, then that same substance in small amounts could cure the disease. Hahnemann proposed that disease was a dysfunction of the body's ability to cure itself. Therefore, administering a diluted form of a toxic substance could provide the stimulus the body needed to begin to heal itself (14488).

**Provings.** In order to find homeopathic treatments, Hahnemann conducted "provings." This involved testing substances such as herbs or minerals in healthy people to see what kind of reaction occurred. Reactions were documented in detail in order to determine which substances might serve as treatments for certain conditions. If a substance caused fever, then that substance was noted as a treatment for conditions involving fever.

**Law of infinitesimals.** In the beginning of homeopathy, small doses of the "proved" substance were used. This eventually evolved into using extreme dilutions of the original substance. Hahnemann suggested that the more dilute the substance, the more potent effect it had against a given disease.

**Potentiation through dilution.** Related to the law of infinitesimals is the concept of potentiation through dilution. The preparation of a homeopathic product involves a step-wise dilution process along with succussion. Each dilution is succussed, or shaken vigorously. It is believed that this process leaves behind the image, essence, or spirit of the original compound in the water. The more times this process is repeated, or the more dilute the end-product, the more potent the homeopathic preparation (14486, 14488).

Overall, these theories and principles are generally inconsistent with the current understanding of pharmacology, chemistry and physics.

Common homeopathic ingredients include aconite, antimonium, arnica, belladonna, chamomile, iron, mercury, magnesium, nux vomica, poison ivy, and many others.

### **Adverse Reactions:**

None known. Most homeopathic preparations contain little or no active ingredient. Therefore, homeopathic preparations are unlikely to have any beneficial or adverse effects.

### **Interactions with Herbs & Supplements:**

None known.

### **Interactions with Drugs:**

None known.

### **Interactions with Foods:**

None known.

### **Interactions with Lab Tests:**

None known.

## Interactions with Diseases or Conditions:

None known.

## Dosage/Administration:

No typical dosage. Dosing depends on the specific homeopathic product being used. Homeopathic preparations follow a specific nomenclature to indicate the level of dilution, and therefore, the level of potency. Dilutions of 1/10 are signified by "X." So, 1X = 1/10, 2X = 1/100, 3X = 1/1000, and 6X = 1/1,000,000, and so on. Dilutions of 1/100 are signified by "C." So, 1C = 1/100, 2C = 1/10,000, 3C = 1/1,000,000, and so on (14487).

## Editor's Comments:

The legal status of homeopathic remedies in the United States is unique. In 1938, the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act was sponsored by Senator Royal Copeland who also happened to be a homeopathic physician. The senator wrote into the legislation wording that recognized all products listed in the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia of the United States as drugs, to be regulated by FDA. The legislation passed, and as a result, homeopathic products are legally sold in food stores, pharmacies, and elsewhere as a unique category of drug.

In 2003, sales of homeopathic products in the United States were from \$300 to \$450 million. They are among the top 10 best selling nonprescription products in the specialty analgesics, analgesics for children, and cough and cold category (14490).

Despite such widespread use, the FDA regulates homeopathic preparations much less stringently than conventional drugs. Homeopathic products are not required to prove effectiveness or safety. Some regulations do apply. For example, homeopathic products can only be sold without a prescription if they are specifically for self-limiting conditions such as the common cold. Products marketed for severe conditions such as cancer are prescription only (14489).

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