

## Taking a Case History (By Traditional Methods)

Even if your muscle testing skills are very good, it is well worth the time and effort to learn how to take a case properly and learn to work out the right remedy by traditional methods. Learning to do this will improve your grasp of homeopathic principles and make you more effective than you otherwise would be. It is too easy to fall into the trap of testing based on a single symptom, rather than on the whole person or their entire symptom picture. Of course, you can make this mistake with a more traditional approach, also, if you allow yourself to.

You only get the answers to the questions you ask with a muscle test. If you don't have enough knowledge to ask the right questions, you will only get poor answers. There are many books on the market that take a symptomatic approach and the FDA rules which apply to homeopathy require a statement on the label indicating what the remedy is for. Following the guidelines of these books or operating according to the labels on the bottles will keep you from being effective and cause you to make serious errors unless you temper them with a good look at the entire symptom picture and some skill at traditional repertorising (matching the presenting symptoms to a remedy description).

For the next few pages, we are going to discuss the classical approach to homeopathic prescribing. This is a fairly complex topic and takes time, patience, and practice. Our goal here is not to make you an expert overnight. It is to teach you how repertorising is done, and give you enough information to make your muscle testing, if you use it, as accurate as possible.

***A word of caution here about self-prescribing.*** It can be difficult to be objective about your own symptoms, especially mental or emotional ones. If you do not maintain objectivity, both muscle testing and repertorising can be colored by your own perceptions. Here is an example for you to think about:

You have a particular physical symptom but you feel quite normal and calm emotionally. However, everyone around you seems to be seeing you as increasingly irritable and touchy. You have already forgiven and forgotten that your husband left you standing in the rain in front of the grocery store a few days ago. You got thoroughly chilled but seemed to throw off the effects of it as soon as you got warm again.

Being perceived by others as irritable and touchy and getting chilled, which you may be over-looking, could be vital elements in the overall picture of your ailment. It can often be useful to talk through your case with someone else or, at the very least, take a few minutes to interview yourself just as you would someone else. This is especially important as you are first learning. If you don't feel comfortable with the remedy that you have decided on, or the muscle test checks and balances "anything else, anything different" are not satisfactory, don't take the remedy. Be patient for a day or two, study it out, and don't hesitate to ask for help.

Some people are very good at knowing what their own symptom picture is—much better than anyone else would ever be—but some of us are not, or at least not at particular times in our lives. Sometimes a mis-perception of reality about our moods and emotions is part of the out-of-balance pattern that needs correcting. On the other hand, many people have an innate sense of what they need—at least they do once they learn to trust themselves instead of their doctors. If you don't have this sense already, it would be worth any effort to get it. If you are temporarily out of balance, be sure to get some help from a friend in determining what homeopathic remedy you need.

There are really only two parts to classical prescribing: **The first is getting the symptom picture and the second is deciding which remedy matches that picture best.**

### The Symptom Picture:

Homeopathic practitioners try very hard not to think of people in terms of the disease they are suffering with. The word complaint is often used instead. A practitioner may list sore throat, cough, or headache, but stop short of calling it *Bird Flu*.

Symptoms are the visible signs of the complaint. For example, your child is complaining of a barking cough that is worse at night and better from sitting up. The complaint is the cough and the symptoms are barking sound, worse at night, and better from sitting up. This complaint and its symptoms are much different—and require a different remedy—than if the complaint were deep, moist cough accompanied by high fever and chills, better from lying on the right side.

The **symptom picture** is a detailed list of the symptoms that you are having at present. Symptoms, especially mental and emotional ones, are considered in light of what is usually normal for a person.

Your symptoms are a form of expression and a call for help from your body. In order for a remedy to work well you need to match, as closely as possible, the person's symptoms to a **remedy picture**. The remedy picture is the list of symptoms produced by the remedy in its provings and in the experiences of homeopathic practitioners. These symptoms can be found in a materia medica (sometimes called a remedy guide). The remedy guide lists all of the symptoms that were seen when the remedy was taken for a long time. They indicate a very out of balance, serious state. Hopefully, you will never see a person with all of the listed symptoms. They would be in a very serious state of health, if you do.

Observations are very important. You are not simply looking for aches and pains. You will need to understand the person when healthy and then look for the symptoms that are particular to this illness and this time in her life. Vague, sometimes present and sometimes not symptoms don't count for much. There are, however, some remedies whose symptom pictures include a "changeable" symptom picture in their description.

Every labeled disease or complaint, rather it is cystitis, arthritis or eczema, is also accompanied by symptoms peculiar to the individual who is suffering from it. It differs in significant ways from another case of the same disease. If you think about your own children, you know that each of them reacts to the supposed same illness in a way that is totally unique to them. It is these individual characteristics that guide us to the right remedy.

Simply to prescribe for headache or cough is not enough. If you look up either of these in a repertory you will find many remedies listed for each of them. It is the particular symptoms of the person's headache or cough that lets you begin to narrow down the choice of remedies. If you have become proficient at it, you can sometimes use muscle testing to help you narrow down the choices.

For homeopathic purposes, symptoms are divided into three categories: **general, mental/emotional and physical complaints**. The general category includes such things as what make the person feel better or worse during this illness, and a host of other unusual things that don't fit anywhere else. Before deciding on a remedy, you should be able to match at least 3 or 4 symptoms in each of these areas. Looking for symptoms in the various areas will keep you from focusing too much on just one or two physical or emotional symptoms.

### Note-taking:

When working with homeopathic remedies (or any type of alternative modality) it is the responsible thing to do to keep good notes. With homeopathy your notes should include the symptoms that you observed, the remedy and the potency you decided on. You should make detailed notes as to the instructions you gave concerning the dosage and the length and number of times the remedy should be taken. You

should follow up with the person and include in your notes what kind of results were obtained. All of this takes time, **but it is essential** to responsible homeopathic treatment. I cannot over emphasize this! A scatter-gun in the dark approach will not be as effective as if you had taken the time to document your work and follow-up properly. Furthermore, if a problem arises you will have a clear record of what was done and a better idea of where you want to go next. Keeping records does not automatically obligate you to share them or to make them public.

### **Being observant:**

When making observations to obtain a list of symptoms, pay attention to your first impressions. For example; your child wakes up in the night, crying out and calling for you. You go quickly into her room. What do you immediately smell and see? Does she seem to be in pain or just frightened? Does she want to be held? Does she want the light on or off? These impressions are sometimes all that you will get from a sick child—or an irritable or lethargic adult, for that matter. Even if you use muscle testing to choose the remedy, you will want to have noticed some basic symptoms so that you can verify your choice.

#### *What is it you smell?*

The smell is often the first and most dramatic thing that you notice when you walk into a sick person's room. If the smell is strong and you can describe it clearly, write it down and use it as a symptom. Particular odors, and reactions to odors, are listed in most remedy pictures.

#### *What is it you see?*

Note the general color of the person's skin. Are they pale or flushed? Are their eyes glassy or pain filled. Do they look as if they are feverish? Look around the room for other clues. These might included bed covers that have been kicked off, agitation or restlessness, groaning or annoyance if someone sits on the edge of the bed, etc. Your observations will often tell you far more than the person will be able to.

#### *What is it you feel?*

This feeling refers both to what you feel about the temperature of the various parts of the body and what you feel intuitively about the situation. Be thorough about physical symptoms of sweat, clamminess, or dry skin but do not discount the more subtle things that you sometimes sense.

#### *What is it you hear?*

Some sick people are stoic, others feel better for complaining a little. Some children want to be held or stroked. Others want to just lie there looking pathetic. Are they discouraged, anxious, sad, angry? Often a sick person's behavior changes when observed—they either want attention and sympathy or they want to be left alone. All of these ways of responding to the illness are symptoms and you will find them in the descriptions of the various remedies.

Besides all of the above, be sure to factor in everything else that you know about the person and everything that you know about what has been going on in her life lately. Include any information that has been provided to you by other people, such as members of her family. Consider remedies that she has previously taken and ascertain the results she obtained by taking them.

Besides observation, the asking of pertinent questions is a necessary skill in determining the correct remedy. Keep your questions quite general. The goal is to elicit a response in which the person describes in some detail her particular symptoms. Questions such as "Are you feeling sad?" or "Is it a stinging sort of pain?" often generate a simple yes or no and really doesn't give you much information at all. Try not to put words into the person's mouth with your questions. Sometimes talking about the illness is a form of healing. Learn to be still and just listen.

There is an excellent case-taking questionnaire and symptom check-list in The Complete Homeopathy Handbook by Miranda Castro on pages 227-229. This is a book that I would highly recommend for beginners in the art of homeopathy. It contains a small remedy guide which includes many of the most basic—polycrest—remedies as well as a small, but quite nice, repertory section.

The point of both observation and questioning is to discover at least one symptom in each of the three categories mentioned earlier—physical, mental/emotional, and general—and what makes the person feel better or worse. Never choose a remedy based on a single symptom. This is rarely successful, and if it is, it will have been either luck or good intuition (and there will be those wonderful times when your intuition astonishes even you). The more symptoms that fit the picture, the more effective the remedy will be and the less likely you are to create any false symptoms, make even a little mistake, or miss something.

Once you have your list of symptoms you are ready to *repertorise*. This sounds much more complicated than it really is. Simply look up the complaint, or any one of its symptoms, in the repertory. Then look at the remedies that are listed and match the brief descriptions with the rest of the specific symptoms you have noted. If you have done a good job of observing and asking questions, you should be left with only 2 or 3 remedies to finish choosing between. This is where muscle testing can save you much time and effort and prevent you from choosing a remedy that does not match as closely as it should have.

The next step is to *confirm* that your choice of remedies is the best one. Whether you have arrived at only one remedy, or two or three, go to the materia medica (remedy guide) and look closely at the longer description of each remedy and see if it fits. Occasionally, more than one remedy will have all your symptoms. If so, you need to search for another clue or two that differentiates the remedies. It is very rare to find all of the symptoms listed and, here again, being able to muscle test is very comforting. I have worked with homeopathic remedies for years, with fear and trembling (not to mention spending large amounts of time), and I have had much greater success since I learned to fine-tune my choices with muscle testing.

If you can't seem to pick a remedy that fits, you need more information than you have at the present time. You must return and observe or ask more questions. This whole process becomes easier and simpler every time you do it, until it becomes almost routine. It was interesting, as I wrote this, to realize that I no longer really even think about the steps or the categories. I just automatically look for symptoms that will set the case apart. You, too, will learn to do this with practise.

### ***A rare and confusing phenomenon:***

Your general and emotional/mental symptoms may point to a remedy that does not even list the physical complaint in its picture. For example, you have the flu and are feeling restless, irritable, hot and bothered, and extremely thirsty. You find that sulphur comes up strongly for all your symptoms but isn't listed under flu at all in the repertory. The closest remedy is Bryonia but Bryonia isn't restless or irritable. Read through the remedy pictures again to see which one fits best; the best choice will often be the one that matches the mental/emotional symptoms rather than the physical complaint because it covers more of the whole picture and the whole person. If the strong general and emotional/mental symptoms point to one remedy, then give it, even if it doesn't have your physical complaint listed in its picture. You will get better results by following this advice.

A remedy that has a good reputation for any physical complaint is always more likely to work well if there are general and/or emotional/mental symptoms that match to go along with it.