

# **THE HOMEOPATHIC APPROACH TO STRESS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

We all suffer stress in our own unique way. Stress is a vague term that can apply to most any uncomfortable circumstance. Effective stress-management needs to define what the person suffering from stress means by it.

What is stressful to one may not be to another. For some, public speaking is sheer terror. For others, it seems the only way to fulfillment. Certain people find parenting most rewarding, while others tolerate it at best. I know teachers who thrive in a large class of unruly students, while other teachers find it stressful even at the best of times. For some children, a reprimand is like water off a duck's back, while for others even a slightly raised voice seems traumatic.

Just like death and taxes, stress is an inevitable part of life. The question is not how to avoid stress. Rather, how can we improve our response to stress.

When it comes to stress response, what distinguishes one person from another is **resistance**. Resistance to stress means that what was once viewed as a restrictive experience inducing fear, anger, hypertension, or stomach ulcers, can be less distressing, experienced more as **an opportunity to enrich our lives**.

For such a transformation to become permanent requires more than an attitude change. Homeopathic stress-management requires that we understand our stress response in a broader context, namely as a reflection of **our defense mechanism in action**. How did we learn to experience our stress and react to it the way we do?

Of course there are circumstances that prove stressful to most everyone. Yet I've heard of the exceptional few who were able to thrive despite suffering even the horrors of the Holocaust!

**What makes some people more resistant to stress than others, and how can those who suffer from stress develop resistance?** That's the

million dollar question which homeopathic medicine attempts to answer (for a more complete explanation of the principles and practice of homeopathy, please read my article *“The Patient, Not the Condition”*).

The following case examples are intended to illustrate the importance of a holistic approach in the homeopathic approach to stress management. (Names and circumstances have been altered to protect patient confidentiality.) How does the person define stress? How do they differ from other people suffering from the same condition. How do they experience and react to stress? Remember, **only by tailoring the treatment to the individual can homeopathic medicine be effective.**

#### **Case # 1**

Jim is a 52-year-old senior office manager. In the past few months, he has been suffering from sinus infections, with severe pain in the forehead and behind the eyes. The pain is worse in the morning. It wakes him every morning, always at the same time, between 4-5am. He wakes in a sweat then, feeling hot, especially in his feet, which he uncovers to cool off.

Jim has been under a lot of stress in the past several months, ever since a co-worker, who also happened to be a good friend, suddenly quit his management team. It took Jim by surprise. Now, he's stuck with twice the amount of work, while the office looks for someone to fill the post. He feels angry and betrayed by his friend, a feeling of disappointment.

When asked if he's ever felt this way before, he says it reminds him of how he often felt growing up, that he never felt he could really count on any of his friends. On further reflection, he realizes it's an old feeling that he had even in childhood, ever since his father suddenly died. It left him feeling abandoned, sad, but also angry, as if his father, his best friend, had left on purpose.

## ANALYSIS

What we need here is a prescription designed to help raise Jim's resistance to this feeling of disappointment and abandonment, of deceived friendship. Clearly, this is the most central stress in his life, the kind of stress he is most vulnerable to. Furthermore, the medicine most homeopathic to his way of coping must be able to influence sinuses, along with sleep disturbances at 4-5am, and heat, especially heat in the lower extremities, which forces the person to uncover their feet.

This is just what the proving of the mineral ***Sulphur*** produced on healthy people. (Proving is an experiment conducted on healthy volunteers to determine the side effects of the substance under investigation. According to the homeopathic principle of "Similars", what produces symptoms in healthy people cures similar symptoms in the sick.)

Among other things, the proving symptoms of sulphur are:

- The tendency to wake at 4-5 am, along with a tendency to experience heat.
- The tendency for uncovering feet.

- The tendency to produce nasal congestion leading to inflammation of the sinuses, which tend to be worse in the morning.
- The feeling of being abandoned by those near and dear to them, a feeling of deceived friendship.

Soon after the prescription, Jim developed a very runny nose, a thick, profuse, yellow discharge that seemed to gush from the depths of his nasal passages. At the same time, he felt an instant relief of the pain behind his eyes, a pain he had been suffering with for nearly two months. Within two nights, Jim's sleep had normalized. He began sleeping through the night, and waking refreshed. Moreover, his sweats stopped, and he no longer needed to stick his feet out from under the covers. Because his energy was better, he felt less overwhelmed with his workload. Most importantly, he realized that he didn't need to feel responsible for the extra workload. Doing his best was all that was expected of him. The homeopathic treatment had helped Jim develop resistance to his way of coping with stress!

As for his friendship, Jim realized that by choosing to leave, his friend too had done the best he could for himself, and that this had nothing to do with their friendship. With time, Jim began to feel more comfortable with his friends' choices in their lives. This in turn helped him develop resistance to issues around abandonment, helping him feel more secure, better able to enjoy his friends.

## **CASE # 2**

Michelle is a 27-year-old office secretary who consults me for stomach pains. These have been bothering her off and on for the past two years, but are getting much worse in the past several months. She has consulted her family physician, who advised a whole battery of tests, all of which have proved inconclusive.

The pains are of a violent, cramping nature, as if a tearing inside. The only relief she gets is by bending double, or by pressing her fists into her gut. At times, the pains get so severe, she throws up.

On inquiry as to what may be precipitating these attacks, Michelle points out that the pains are always provoked by quarrels. She has a new

boy friend, who tends to be reserved, uncommunicative, and undemonstrative in his affections toward her. While she thinks he likes her, she keeps wondering if he really does, and takes his lack of affection as a personal slight, a sign of disapproval. This in turn makes her feel extremely angry, which leads to scenes of yelling, followed by tears, withdrawal, and then an eventual resolution... until the next confrontation. Each time they fight, she ends up having another stomach attack. The two of them have been seeking couple counseling for some time now, yet her pains keep getting worse.

When asked where this sensitivity to anger might come from, Michelle tells me about her upbringing. She comes from a large family. She has 6 older brothers. Not only is she the only girl, she's the youngest as well. Growing up, she got accustomed to being doted on, getting her wishes met. Everyone was so affectionate at home, and she was the apple of everyone's eye.

A few years ago, when she met her boyfriend, her family disapproved, as he was from a different ethnic background. When they told her she either had to stop seeing him, or

leave, she felt outraged, and found herself an apartment. That's when her stomach problems started. For a year, the family ignored her. Now, they have a sort of truce, but she constantly feels their disapproval, and feels defensive and angry.

## ANALYSIS

Michelle's way of coping with anger with her boyfriend or her family is to develop pain in her digestive tract. She and her boy friend have wisely decided to seek counseling, yet her pain is getting worse. She could resort to painkillers, but is reluctant, due to the side effects, and because she feels that will do nothing to help her mature in the long run.

From the homeopathic perspective, what is needed is to help Michelle develop resistance to her sensitivity to conflict and criticism. Moreover, to be homeopathic, the substance chosen must have an affinity for the digestive system. It must be capable of producing these kinds of sharp, tearing pains, which are better with pressure, compelling the person to double-up.

Which is just what the plant *Colocynth* (commonly known as bitter cucumber) is known to produce,

when given to healthy volunteers (I stress this word to emphasize the dedication so many people have shown over so many years in an attempt to uncover the therapeutic indications for all of the over 3000 substances currently available in our homeopathic Materia Medica!!).

Some of the side effects of Colocynth are as follows:

- Stomach disorders and abdominal pains caused by anger, and indignation
- Emotions felt in the stomach
- Stomach and abdominal pains that are violent, cramping, griping, tearing cutting...
- Stomach and abdominal pains relieved by pressure, by bending double, compelling them to bend double.
- Vomiting after anger
- Sensitivity to anger, with indignation.
- Sensitivity to criticism.

Michelle felt instant relief, after a single dose of colocynth! Her pains disappeared, and have not returned in over 6 months. As important has been her change in temperament. Her sensitivity to criticism has been greatly improved. Instead of seeing

everything any of her loved ones say to her as a slight, she now weighs what she hears, tries to understand where the other person is coming from, before responding. Her response has become far more graceful, wiser, and more tolerant. She realizes the profound change in herself, and concludes that homeopathic medicine has helped her take a quantum leap in maturing.

### **Case # 3**

George is Michelle's boy friend. He's agreed to come in and see me, after witnessing his girl friend's remarkable recovery from her stomach aches, and the change he's witnessed in her personality.

He feels his main problem is a negative attitude, along with very low self-esteem. Although from appearance George looks strikingly handsome, he himself feels unattractive. He thinks it's because he grew up with an older brother, who used to make fun of the way he looked. His brother was athletic and more social than George, who always felt socially awkward.

When asked to describe how he got to be this way, George talks of his father, who was always negative.

Nothing was ever right. He was always distant, never affectionate. When alone with his father, he often felt an awkward silence, accompanied by an icy feeling in his stomach. Fear of his father was not uncommon, especially as he had a temper. "He yelled often, slapped from time to time, and would often leave me feeling numb."

As for his mother, she was pragmatic, not affectionate. She took care of all the physical necessities.

Now, he too is cold in temperament, numb, unable to express his affection. Though aware that his emotions, or lack of them, are getting in the way of a good relationship, he can't help the way he acts, distant. "That's how I feel inside, totally apart, even from myself. I need my space. I'm not a feely, touchy person. Affection is not a part of me, though I know that if it were, Michelle and I could be a lot happier."

George can't understand why any one would find him interesting, as he feels he has little to offer. He tends to be a loner, doesn't like to socialize, and though successful in his studies to the point of winning a scholarship, he constantly feels a failure, that he'll

never amount to much. Yet, his girl friend's family sees him as nothing but confidant. "It's a facade I put on, from fear of what they'd really think of me, if they knew me for real."

Though passive in public, he does have a temper, and can yell at his girl friend, or call her names, putting her down. He swears often then. Also, he can throw things in anger, or hit walls. "My anger is at myself most of all, a feeling of self loathing."

## **ANALYSIS**

George's stress is his inferiority complex, the result of a deep wound suffered from childhood, from being raised by a dysfunctional father. It's the result of having sustained abuse from the one who was supposed to love and protect him (who himself probably learned to be abusive from a long line of abused ancestors.).

From a homeopathic perspective, what George needs is a prescription that will help him developed resistance to his poor self-image. Clearly, he needs a lot of psychotherapy. **The beauty of homeopathic medicine is that, as an adjunct to whatever other therapy you may be using, it can assist in**

## **the healing. Stimulate your defense mechanism, and you speed up your rate of recovery!**

While there are many homeopathic medicines associated with poor self-image, one of the best known is a plant by the name of *Anacardium* (Commonly known as the cashew nut). This plant, when homeopathically prepared, can produce in healthy people:

- Tremendously low self worth, coupled with self-hatred.
- Rage, swearing, and abusiveness, especially toward loved ones.
- A feeling of separation, from oneself, and from the rest of the world.
- Aversion to company, a tendency to being antisocial. This is related to...
- Anticipation anxiety (This makes Anacardium a frequent choice for helping students suffering from low self confidence to face their exams more calmly!).
- Estrangement, from one's family, and from society.

Although George's self confidence didn't improve overnight, his behavior toward Michelle did. From the moment he took his homeopathic medicine, he became more relaxed, more communicative, and less defensive. His temper improved. With time, he was able to argue, without having to lose his temper, or be abusive. He also described himself as feeling more in touch with himself, less disconnected, and more empathetic toward himself. It's as if he realized he and others deserve love, despite his suffering as a child.