

midirs

In deep



Homoeopathy and pregnancy: caring for the whole woman

Lyssa Clayton

Pregnancy is a unique experience for each woman. For some women the huge physical, emotional and spiritual changes of pregnancy can present challenges including anxieties, fear, depression and more physically expressed problems, ranging from mild discomforts to more limiting and potentially serious conditions.

Pregnancy is an ideal time to use homoeopathy, as the remedies are non-toxic, safe when used appropriately, and free from side effects. Therefore, homoeopathic treatment can be part of helping the woman to be in as healthy a state as possible through her pregnancy and to approach birth and the transition to motherhood with confidence in herself, her baby and her body.

I see many similarities between the arts of midwifery and homoeopathy, in the ethos of midwifery and homoeopathy and in the intention of how midwives and homoeopaths are

with women. We know that a woman is not just a uterus with a passenger – she is a whole person traversing a major life event. If there's nothing wrong, we do nothing to disturb that, we hold the space and are available. When assistance is required, we know our role is to offer the simplest, least invasive way to stimulate change, leaving the control and choices with her and the wisdom she has of herself and her baby. We all hope to help each woman engage with and enjoy her pregnancy; we call on preventative strategies to help to keep her pregnancy and birth normal or to get back

on track if things start to deviate. A midwife is the expert in normal birth and knowledgeable in ways to *keep* birth normal and when to seek other input.

As a homoeopath I know that there are, in most situations that might arise during the childbearing year, alternative paths to try; solutions that may be less invasive and/or more respectful than some of the Western medical options; choices that can be used alongside, and complement, skilled, compassionate midwifery, or in conjunction with essential medical intervention when addressing more serious or complicated situations. We can complement each other's skills and knowledge. I've just reread the preface to Sandra Perko's book *Homoeopathy for the modern pregnant woman and her infant*. It is written by a midwife who has incorporated homoeopathy into her practice. I recommend it, as an inspiring description of similarity between these complementary arts.

I find that working with a midwife is incredibly satisfying. There is potential for relationships of mutual respect and learning to develop. There is a chance to dialogue, explore possibilities and invite co-operation by simply asking 'Well I've tried this and this, what can you suggest here? Let's see what we can achieve between us in this situation'

What women come with

So why do women seek homoeopathic care? Well, for anything and everything! For some women homoeopathy is already central to the way in which they care for themselves and their families. For others it is completely new and unknown. Some women come because they wish to remain autonomous but at the same time know that they need a further source of support and want to have homoeopathic remedies available for them to use during labour and immediately postnatally. Others want a way to avoid conventional medications or find that the solutions they have already tried have just not helped enough.

Looking back at my practice I can list a huge variety of 'presenting symptoms'.

Specific concerns have included: recurrent miscarriage, debilitating morning sickness, fears stemming from previous trauma, difficulties establishing breastfeeding, with cracked nipples, persistent pain and/or sudden drop in milk supply, after pains, caesarean section or episiotomy wounds, depression and anxieties, severe pelvic pain and mobility problems, constipation in mother and/or baby, exhaustion, pressure to agree to induction and wanting alternatives, colic in newborns, help to avoid a recurrence of pregnancy related conditions and pathology, urinary tract and chest infections which have not cleared with antibiotics.

Equally there can be situations of family or personal history of pregnancy problems or experiences of grief and loss. Some women have existing health problems where conventional treatments during pregnancy are contraindicated and no longer safe. Sometimes women come for the first time months after giving birth still having severe pain from episiotomy or caesarean section scar or needing a space to process shock or disappointment. Women use homoeopathy for promoting wellness and normality, and some may see it as a way of being pro-active in having different tools in place to increase their options and choices for gentle, holistic care.



Homoeopathy

The word homeopathy stems from the Greek words *homoios* which means 'similar' and *pathos* which means 'suffering'. The fundamental principle of homoeopathy is known as the 'Law of Similars' a principle dating back to Hippocrates and found in Ancient Egyptian and Greek medicine.

Homoeopathy was formulated in the late 18th and early 19th century by a German physician named Samuel Hahnemann (1755 - 1843). Unsettled by the violence of medical treatments of the day, Hahnemann left medicine and worked as a translator of medical texts. In 1789, he read that *Cinchona* bark, from which quinine is derived, was an effective treatment for malaria due to being bitter and astringent. Through curiosity, he took material doses of the bark and discovered that, in response to the drug toxicity, he produced symptoms of intermittent, malaria-like fever which disappeared when he stopped taking doses. He concluded that *Cinchona* cured malaria because of symptom similarity - it had the power to produce similar symptoms in healthy



individuals. Continued observation, experiment and clinical experience for over two centuries have shown that a medicinal substance will evoke a healing response particular to the unique interplay of symptoms it can also produce. In health we can be fluid, responding and adapting appropriately to the different situations and challenges we encounter. Sometimes we get stuck and need help to free up movement and dynamism, to find flexibility and creativity again in how we live.

Rekindling healthy adaptability during pregnancy and birth could be through the woman's own deep inner work, conversation, creative and artistic exploration, reading, sensitive listening from a friend, midwife, or homoeopath, or a remedy stimulus if needed.

The Law of Similars recognises that symptoms are intelligent attempts by the human organism to heal itself, whether from stress or local infection. Symptoms send the message 'this is what I need to fully heal this imbalance'. The remedy chosen must be similar in quality and action to the person's dis-ease. It is the reaction in the person to the remedy stimulus which brings about the restoration of balance, health and wellness. The thousands of remedies available to us today are mainly from the plant, mineral and animal kingdoms but source material also includes chemicals, organic substances and conventional drugs. This way of addressing health concerns gives the woman an opportunity to work with their own energy system and self-healing abilities, using the gentle, dynamic stimulus of a homoeopathically similar remedy.

We will respond to a remedy that has a similar enough resonance to the energetic state we are in. Think about how playing a middle C on the piano causes the other C strings to vibrate; that's similar resonance in action. Remedies are prescribed as pills, tablets or in liquid form. The dosage depends on what the woman comes with, the severity of her symptoms, urgency of the situation, her vital energy and the time available to elicit a change. Initial consultations usually last an hour and a half to two hours, with one hour for subsequent sessions. At follow-ups we assess how the woman and/or baby has responded to the remedy. Sometimes the initial dose is enough, something is unfolding so we wait and see how that continues to evolve. Sometimes the woman needs more of the same remedy stimulus or a new picture has emerged and the prescription is changed to match this new pattern. In response to a well chosen, homoeopathically similar medicine, the underlying cause of imbalance can resolve, the external symptoms will no longer be necessary and can fade away.

What I do and how I work

The more confidence a woman has in herself and her body, and in her ability to make plans and decisions for herself, the healthier her choices can be and the better the potential outcomes. Pregnancy evolves and is informed and coloured by the rest of a woman's life; her birth, health and life history, her social and emotional network, how she perceives herself and what is happening to her. I work to help women and their babies to be in the best state of health physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually during pregnancy, as they enter labour together and as the woman integrates becoming a mother.

As a homoeopath, I believe that health encompasses our entire being rather than just consisting of a collection of isolated, seemingly disconnected symptoms. Health is balance, integration and a dynamic interplay of mind, body and spirit. Dis-harmony occurs when we are knocked off balance by physical and emotional stresses we cannot readily integrate. This leads to the production of symptoms as the human body and vital energy strive to regain health. Symptoms are seen as signposts showing what stimulus is needed, rather than just something that has to be removed.

When a remedy is chosen most appropriately, not only, for example, will nausea melt away, but a woman may find she has more energy, a greater sense of well-being, previous irritation with her partner and children subsides and that she can enjoy life again. My job is to find a pattern match and ask 'What is the common thread linking what her emotions and physical being are telling me. What substance could produce this pattern of symptoms in a healthy person?'

So what is involved?

The important consideration in terms of homoeopathy is every woman's individual and unique experience not just the physiological information provided by test results or a medical diagnosis. When working with a pregnant woman, I am interested in discovering more about her. I need to really, really listen, to hear the story, but equally, to hear what is not being voiced. I observe sensitively, provide time in a safe, confidential space so that she has the freedom to say what is not feeling good or comfortable about pregnancy and motherhood.

In a consultation, I am looking at: the woman's level of vitality, what causes her stress and how she responds to it. I consider her emotional being, and how she experiences specific physical symptoms. I ask her about what changes she notices in herself: 'What would you like help with? What is your experience of that problem or challenge you are facing? Describe what that is like – not why it is.' I also want to gather more

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general information about diet, food cravings and aversions, sleep, dreams, and how has she changed from her pre-pregnant self. These are all important facets of her story and part of building a fuller picture of how she is and I use this information to perceive what might need to change to bring about a greater state of health.

As is also the case for midwives, building a trusting relationship is crucial. This is a dynamic time of transformation, when women need to know that they have people with them who are aware of the challenges and enormity of their journey. Part of my job is to explain as much about homoeopathy as requested, answer questions, explain why there is more than just one remedy for mastitis or to get a

woman's labour well established. I am treating the woman, not picking off symptoms. I explain why, although she comes with severe nausea, heartburn, anxiety, and has become very chilly and fastidious, she will have one remedy to take not five.

Important information might be whether there been a particular trigger or causation to a problem? When did she first notice this? A grief, life change or shock can be the root of what is easily mistaken as a purely physical problem. For example, pelvic pain and instability that dates from a birth injury or fall may well require a different remedy from that which started after moving house, a death in the family, an argument or a close friend moving away. I work with what is presenting, build up a detailed understanding of where the woman is - where is





the pain, what is it like? What helps? What exacerbates it? How do you feel? What else is happening?

Homoeopathy can be used regardless of the choices and paths a woman may end up taking or need to take. Remedies can be useful for any woman's pregnancy and any woman's labour, including home birth, hospital birth or caesarean section. We know a huge range of symptoms can be part of a normal labour. No emotion or way of labouring is right or wrong - what is important is the fluidity of the process. Just as health is manifested in dynamic adaptation to life experiences, where this is blocked we can need something to free us again either in long term chronic situations or in acute phases of life such as labour and birthing a baby.

Late in pregnancy I offer to meet with the woman and her partner, birth supporter, midwife or doula to strengthen the web of support she has around her. We can give more space to fears and anxieties about labour, no matter whether this is because the experience is a complete unknown or whether the woman has previously had distressing and traumatic experiences. Women ask: Will I have the strength, how will I cope, will my energy run out, will I be supported, what might help me? We talk through possible remedies and they have information about remedy pictures and know they can call at any time for advice. Partners or birth supporters can become incredibly acute prescribers.

Part of my vision as homoeopath is to work more collaboratively with midwives in the care of pregnant women and their families; to build communication and share knowledge and information, exploring where our skills overlap and where they differ and complement each other. A recently published review in the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (Adams *et al* 2011) looked at 19 studies by the Network of Researchers in the Public Health of Complementary and Alternative medicine (NORPHCAM) which illustrates the use of many complementary therapies in maternity care in countries such as Germany, New Zealand, Australia. How exciting it would be to see something similar develop in the UK and other countries.

There is a wealth of informative and inspiring literature available for learning about homoeopathic philosophy, principles, remedies, and how to use them. If you are interested in finding out more, I would invite you to make contact with a local homoeopath and talk to them about what they might offer the women you care for. You will find other practitioners ready and keen to work with you.

References and useful resources

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Lyssa Clayton Dip Hom Ed, MA Hons

I began learning about Homoeopathy over 25 years ago and continue to be fascinated by the philosophy and ideas which underpin it and excited by its potential in enhancing and supporting health. I have three children, two of whom are now young adults. Homoeopathy has been an integral and invaluable tool for me in caring for their well-being from pregnancy and birth onwards. I became involved in birth issues in 1987. I joined the local AIMS and ARM groups and then completed the first Scottish Birth Teachers course. I qualified as a Homoeopath in 1998 and with my practice I can now combine these two strands of passionate interest.