

The Royal family swear by homeopathy – but is it just nonsense?

King Charles is a passionate supporter, but are these natural remedies really any better than a placebo?



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King Charles is now a patron of The Faculty of Homeopathy | CREDIT: Toby Melville

Among the many varying recollections in [Prince Harry's memoir, *Spare*](#), he recalls a dinner party with William and Kate. William had a cold, and Meghan responded by fetching her “homeopathic cure-alls... oregano oil and turmeric... Kate announced that he'd never take such unconventional remedies”.

If so, however, the [new Prince of Wales](#) is unusual - because the Royal family has a longstanding relationship with homeopathic medicine, from Edward VIII, who was patron of the London Homeopathic Hospital when he was the Duke of York, through George VI, who added ‘Royal’ to the hospital's name, to the late Queen who was patron of the establishment, now called The Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine.

According to the Faculty of Homeopathy, which supports registered medical professionals with homeopathic practice: “she always travelled with a case of remedies... she enjoyed the sense of security”. King Charles, too, [is now a patron of The Faculty of Homeopathy](#).

Like Charles, my own grandparents and Mum were great believers in the power of homeopathic medicine for all ailments. If I had a cough or cold, Dr Burns, who was brisk and Scottish, would pay me a bedside visit with his fascinating fold-out leather case of potions and powders. He'd quiz me about my symptoms, then tap a substance into folded wraps of sugar powders, or leave a phial of activated water.



Writer Flic Everett, whose grandparents and mother were believers in the power of homeopathic medicine | CREDIT: Chris Watt

Whether it had any effect is questionable. Fellow sceptics suggest the long consultation prior to a prescription is the great appeal of homeopathy, and in the current climate, when two minutes on the phone to a locum GP is a prize, perhaps it's no wonder that interest in homeopathy is rising again.

A 2019 OnePoll survey of 2,000 people in the UK revealed a third were open to trying homeopathy and one in six already use its remedies.

What is homeopathy?

“Homeopathy is a natural form of complementary medicine used by over 200 million people worldwide,” says Cristal Skaling-Klopstock, CEO of Homeopathy UK.

“The remedies are made from substances designed to stimulate the body's own healing abilities and work on the principle of ‘like cures like,’” she says. “So a substance taken in small amounts will cure the same symptoms it causes in large amounts. For instance, a hay fever sufferer may benefit from *Allium Cepa* (onion) because it produces symptoms such as watery eyes and runny nose. Homeopathy treats the whole person, rather than only focusing on symptoms.”

One of the largest manufacturers of homeopathic remedies, Nelsons, explains the creation process as, “crushing a plant...or mineral substance then putting it into a solvent such as grain alcohol.” It's then diluted in alcohol and water, many times, to achieve a “therapeutic dilution.”

After each, the mixture is vigorously agitated to deliver a calibrated amount of shaking - or ‘succussion.’” Homeopaths believe this process is vital to ensure the resulting remedy is therapeutic.

Long history

However to me, this all sounds like magical-thinking nonsense; and slightly less scientific than grinding up unicorn horn into a poultice.

Yet homeopathy has been one of the best known and loved complementary medicines for over 250 years, since its discovery by Samuel Hahnemann, who developed the belief that “like cures like” and died a millionaire in 1843.



'Homeopathy treats the whole person, rather than only focusing on symptoms' | CREDIT: Getty Images

To call yourself a homeopath, the training is certainly rigorous. Sarah Davison is one and a natural menopause expert (thrivehomeopathy.com), and completed a three-year BSc in Homeopathic Medicine, as well as a further training which gives her a licence to practise.

She explains how remedies are curated. “Medicines are selected by the homeopath on the basis of the ‘total symptom picture’. This includes the root cause, their physical and mental state, temperament and physical characteristics.”

Despite the claim that there is no substantial evidence, she argues, “there is gold standard evidence in the form of randomised controlled trials in peer-reviewed journals. That said, research into homeopathy is quite a new field.”

Randomised trials

According to Homeopathy UK, by the end of 2021, [148 double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled trials](#) had been published, with 44 per cent finding that homeopathy was effective. Only three per cent were negative and 53 per cent were inconclusive, results which, Homeopathy UK suggests, are on a par with standard medical trials.

However, a House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report in 2010 found that homeopathy performed no better than placebos, and argued its principles are “scientifically implausible”. In 2017, NHS England recommended that GPs should not prescribe homeopathic cures, while The [National Institute of Health and Care Excellence \(NICE\)](#) will not recommend the treatment to NHS practices.

“There is no evidence that homeopathy works,” says NHS GP Rachel Ward. “Having a long consultation can have a positive placebo effect, but clinicians worry that if a person is unwell, you are vulnerable - and homeopathy is a paid service that people might be spending money on with false hope. A placebo effect is not going to cure your cancer.

“Most of the time, homeopathy is not unsafe. But this is an unregulated process, so you don’t really know what you’re getting - if you take amoxicillin, or paracetamol, you know it’s a standardised medicine that will work.”

But according to Skaling-Klopstock, “Homeopathy can help with a wide range of chronic conditions such as arthritis, asthma, PMS and infertility as well as acute conditions, like insect bites, coughs, and ear infections.”

Refuting the claim that no studies support its efficacy, she continues: “The strongest study to date found that homeopathic medicines (when individually prescribed) are 1.5- to two times more likely to have a beneficial effect than placebo.”

I remain to be convinced, although in fairness, homeopathy does at least align with that key principle of medicine: “First, do no harm”.

Have you tried any homeopathic remedies? Tell us in the comments



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