

Treating alcohol dependency with homeopathy by Mary-Jane Sharratt of Sussex Homeopathy

Alcohol consumption in the UK is increasing and is estimated to be responsible for 33,000 deaths per annum, some in conjunction with other factors. While rates of liver disease are falling across the rest of Europe, the UK is seeing rising rates of liver disease. Since the 1950s, the volume of alcohol consumed per adult has more than doubled from 5.07 litres per person over 14 to 11.2 litres in 2007. In addition, wine and beer now have a higher alcohol content than 50 years ago.

Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol will, over time, deplete the body of essential vitamins and minerals. In particular levels of Vitamin C, Magnesium, Zinc and several of the B Vitamins (B1, B6, B12 and folate) are usually found to be reduced in heavy drinkers. This is due to a combination of poor nutrition, with alcohol often comprising a significant proportion the calorie intake of heavy drinkers, and increased excretion of these vitamins and minerals.

Abuse of alcohol can also result in oral and digestive tract cancers and diseases of the liver.

At a social level persistent heavy drinking affects not just the drinker but also his/her family, friends and work colleagues.

Homeopathy is a holistic medicine so treats the whole person for physical, mental and emotional symptoms. Patients may be passive, for example "I know I drink too much", or may be actively trying to reduce or stop drinking. Passive patients are often seeking treatment for another condition but their consumption of alcohol may reduce as they progress with treatment (see the case below).

After an initial consultation, which includes taking a full medical history, each patient is prescribed the homeopathic remedy which best fits their individual symptoms. There is not a single remedy which is used to treat people with alcohol dependency, although certain remedies have been shown to be particularly effective in the treatment of alcohol abuse. The choice of remedy will depend on a wide variety of factors, and it is therefore advisable to consult a qualified homeopath.

It is beneficial to combine homeopathic treatment with supplements to support the weakest organs and to replenish the body with the vitamins and minerals which have become deficient.

In clinical practice it is seen that alcohol dependency almost always has an emotional root and finding the cause of excessive drinking can greatly assist the effectiveness of the treatment. People commonly fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Brought up in a family of heavy drinkers, or where one parent drank heavily
- Drinking began as a habit and has now become an addiction
- A single specific stressful event, or a series of traumas have increased the need for alcohol

The state that induces them to drink is also important. Some of the more usual emotional states that precede excessive alcohol consumption are:

- Lack of confidence
- Depression
- Drinking to forget
- Grief
- Loneliness
- Sociability
- Need for stimulants

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The chosen homeopathic remedy will address both the cause of the problem and the emotional state. For example, it may address a lack of confidence which started in childhood with an aggressive, heavy-drinking father. After homeopathic treatment, patients suffering from depression often experience an alleviation in their symptoms, and those who dwell on past negative events may begin to move on.

Alongside the homeopathic prescription, supplements are often recommended. These may include:

- A support for the liver, such as *Carduus Marianus* (milk thistle), taken either in homeopathic form or as a tincture or tablet
- Vitamin B Complex, to replace the B vitamins that are depleted from heavy drinking
- Chromium which is a trace mineral that can help balance the blood sugar, and thus reduce cravings for alcohol
- Vitamin C
- Zinc
- Magnesium

The latter three can be administered as part of a multi-vitamin and mineral tablet although a relatively high dose of specific vitamins and minerals for a short time is often beneficial as heavy drinkers are likely have low levels of these essential substances.

Furthermore, patients who are trying to reduce or cease their alcohol consumption are encouraged to eat regularly with a small meal 3 to 5 times a day. They should also consume plenty of complex carbohydrates, such as brown rice and pasta, oats, root vegetables, beans and pulses. Both these measures will help to balance the blood sugar and reduce the craving for drink. Many heavy drinkers find that they need to consume more food when they stop drinking as many of their calories previously came from alcohol.

The first few homeopathic appointments may be weekly or fortnightly, to ensure that patients have support whilst they stop drinking. They are also encouraged to join Alcoholics Anonymous and embark on the 12 step programme, a system which gives considerable support to those who go through it.

Case example

A man who suffered from painful sinusitis sought homeopathic help. When taking down details of his lifestyle it became clear that he would drink steadily from the time he came home from work until he went to bed. He rarely became inebriated but his temper was degenerating, and he was short-tempered and irritable with his family. He was given the homeopathic remedy *Nux Vomica*, which fitted his sinus symptoms as well as his inclination to over-indulge in alcohol and rich food. The sinus symptoms cleared up very quickly, and within three months he had reduced his alcohol intake by two thirds without any deliberate effort to do so.

Homeopathy can be extremely useful for those who have made a decision to stop drinking as well as those who drink in excess to the detriment of their overall health. A rounded approach to treatment, including a supplementation programme can help speed the return to optimum health.

This was written for Your Doc Medical in March 2009 at their request. The publisher wished to include caveats stating that there was no evidence that homeopathy was an effective treatment, so I withdrew the article.

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