

Musculoskeletal complaints improve with homeopathy

Millions of people suffer from musculoskeletal complaints including rheumatic diseases in countries all across the world¹⁻³. Many consult with complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practitioners⁴ and homeopathy is one of the most frequently used CAM modalities⁵. An increasing amount of documentation confirms homeopaths' positive experience in treating patients suffering from these complaints.

Twenty-three studies testing the effect of homeopathy in musculoskeletal complaints

As many as 23 research studies have been carried out to determine the effect of homeopathy for patients suffering from rheumatic and other musculoskeletal complaints⁶⁻³⁰ (rheumatoid arthritis⁶⁻¹⁴, osteoarthritis¹⁵⁻²⁰, fibromyalgia²¹⁻²⁵). These trials, which include a total of over 2 300 patients, overall show positive results in favour of homeopathy. In most studies patients suffered from long-term complaints and were treated with homeopathic remedies for an average of four to five months. Examples include studies with 77 % improvement over the first month of treatment in 400 rheumatic patients²⁰; reduced severity of pain in 87 % after six months¹⁴; and reduced pain, stiffness and swelling of joints in 85 % after three months of treatment of long-standing osteoarthritis¹⁷.

Homeopathy is safer and at least as effective as conventional treatment

In five studies including almost 500 patients homeopathy was found to be more effective than conventional treatment^{11,13-14,20,25}, in three (n=778 participants) it was equally effective^{15-16,18} and only in one small trial (n=36) was homeopathy inferior to conventional drugs¹⁹. All ten studies considering the safety of treatment found that homeopathy was safe and not associated with any of the side-effects which are typical of many conventional drugs^{10-12,14-16,18-19,25-26}. In four trials patients were able to reduce their intake of conventional drugs^{6,9,11,29}, including reduction of prednisone ($p < 0.05$)⁶, a drug known to cause a number of unwanted side-effects.

Homeopathy better than placebo

There is always a chance that improvement after any type of treatment may be the result of the so-called placebo effect, which to a large extent is explained as being induced by patients' belief that they will improve. The positive effect of thorough homeopathic consultations, often lasting more than one hour, was indeed confirmed in a recently published trial on homeopathic treatment of patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis⁷. However, in the case of homeopathic remedies used to treat patients suffering from rheumatic and other musculoskeletal complaints, seven out of ten studies show an effect which is significantly better than placebo (positive n=518 participants^{8,10-11,21-24,27,30}, not positive n=163^{6-7,19}).

In a systematic literature review researchers found significant positive effects of homeopathy compared to placebo even when they only considered studies that were of the highest methodological quality ($p = 0.002$)⁵. Other researchers concluded that although there was not sufficient evidence to allow for firm conclusions, results to date favoured homeopathic treatment in osteoarthritis³¹.

Improvements in objective tests

In three trials objective tests were used to determine the efficacy of homeopathic medicines^{8,17,22-23}. Blood tests showed significant reduction of ESR after homeopathic treatment in a blinded trial including 58 patients diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis ($p < 0.01$)⁸. Blood tests also showed that homeopathic remedies positively influenced antioxidant mechanisms in a trial of 47 patients suffering from long-standing osteoarthritis¹⁷, an effect which is important in treatment of these patients. In a study of patients diagnosed with fibromyalgia, EEG measurement showed significant differences between those who had received homeopathic medicines and those who were given placebo²²⁻²³.

Conclusion: Homeopathy should be considered as a viable therapeutic option for patients suffering from rheumatic and other musculoskeletal complaints. More research should be carried out to further determine the effectiveness of homeopathy for these patients.

For safe and effective homeopathic treatment, patients should make sure that the practitioner they consult is a registered member of an ECCH or ICH Member Association. For information, please refer to www.homeopathy-ecch.eu and outside Europe www.homeopathy-ich.org

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