

HOMOEOPATHIC TREATMENT IN GERIATRICS

Geriatrics is a very unique branch of healthcare, focussing on the conditions presented in the elderly. The body of the elderly person differs physiologically from that of an adult. What may present as a disease in an adult would merely be an ageing effect in the elderly person. Due to the physiological organ reserves of the elderly, this population group will be more vulnerable towards certain conditions, such as dehydration after mild gastroenteritis for example.

Ageing is a very unique experience, with varying disabilities and ailments due to wear and tear, natural tissue atrophy and deterioration of bodily functions. The degree of impairment is dependent on the physiological reserves of the various organs. A person who has abused his or her body with smoking, poor dietary habits and a sedentary lifestyle will be more inclined to have various ailments in old age. Getting older can be a distressing time in a person's life as it accompanies the decline of many vital body functions, such as a lack of energy, mental acuity, vision, hearing, movement and sexual ability. There often is general sense of lack of wellbeing.

The elderly commonly present with non-specific and vague diseases, or these are often complicated by delirium and confusion. They might find it difficult to express their ailments due to cognitive impairment. Confusion in the elderly may be due to a benign problem like a bladder infection or constipation or due to a life-threatening condition such as cardiac or renal failure. Serious conditions like pneumonia in the elderly often only present with a mild fever, dehydration and confusion and may thus be missed.

This huge array of possible diseases and multiple medical disorders opens the pathway to over-treatment. The elderly are unfortunately subject to polypharmacy, the over-prescription of drugs. This may result in serious drug interactions with lethal consequences. As most drugs are metabolised by the liver and secreted by the kidneys, over-medication will result in additional stress on these organs which are already impaired in the elderly person.

The ageing person also has an ageing immune system which is vulnerable to numerous conditions and a deterioration of vitality. Homoeopathy offers the ideal treatment modality for senior patients because its basic treatment philosophy stems from the school of thought that disease and a lack of well-being are caused by a weakness of the body's vital forces. Homeopathy is a system of medicine that uses minute dosages of substances that originate from plants, animal products, minerals and many other natural substances. Homoeopathy enhances the body's own defences. Homoeopathy is based on the "Principle of similars" which means that a microdose of the selected remedy will heal whatever pattern of symptoms that substance would cause in large doses on test subjects. Homoeopathy offers a unique form of treatment as it considers the person as a whole taking physical, emotional and constitutional elements into account. A homoeopath asks detailed questions about the physical, emotional and mental health. Facts about the person's family history, lifestyle, previous history, detailed medication history, likes, dislikes and possible fears are established. Due to the minute doses (also called potencies) of the remedy provided, side-effects cannot occur, which makes homoeopathy the safest mode of treatment to take, especially in the case of the elderly, where cognitive functions are impaired and weak memory may be an issue. The older person will not be able to over-dose in the event of taking the remedy more frequently than prescribed.

Homoeopathy has shown to be a desirable form of intervention in many common health conditions in the elderly. Arthritis and rheumatism, which are due to wear and tear, trauma, uric acid deposition or infection of the joints and synovia, respond well to homoeopathic remedies. The common prescription of NSAID's creates serious side-effects and should preferably never be used. Side-effects of anti-inflammatories include gastric bleeding, cardiac, liver and kidney damage.

In all of the following homoeopathy can offer assistance. Hair loss and hair thinning may be due to dietary, hormonal and other problems. Weakness, debility, loss of strength, especially while walking are serious problems in the elderly as they may also result in falls and fractures. Osteoporosis is common in women but men may also be afflicted. A good diet, high in calcium and magnesium, green vegetables and healthy fats are helpful.

Heart disease with an irregular heart rhythm, weakening of the heart muscle and poor pumping action resulting in less blood supply and oxygen to the muscles is another concern. The walls of the arteries lose their elasticity and may result in high blood pressure, heart failure, heart attack, stroke and kidney disease. There are numerous homoeopathic remedies that may result in an extremely satisfactory improvement of cardiac symptoms and enhanced quality of life.

Mental slowing is of great concern to the elderly with the fear that the condition may result in Alzheimer. The individual loses the cognitive function of thinking, loss of concentration and memory. Associated symptoms such as mental exhaustion, cold extremities and body, cataracts and hard of hearing may respond well to homoeopathy. Alzheimer Disease is a condition most feared by the elderly and their families. It is a progressive brain disease that ultimately leads to a complete inability to carry out the simplest tasks and severely affects all cognitive functions such as reasoning, remembering and thinking. Parkinson's disease is a progressive condition of the nervous system which results in tremors, rigid muscles, changes in speech, loss of memory and mental clarity, impaired posture and balance and involuntary movements like fixed stares and blinking. Various homoeopathic medicines can be taken for the management of Parkinson.

Almost every second elderly person is using sleeping tablets for insomnia, a very common complaint. General atherosclerosis is considered to be the main cause of insomnia. Insomnia may aggravate existing memory loss or cause it. There is no safe conventional medicine which will alleviate insomnia as they all come with considerable side-effects. Homoeopathy should seriously be considered to relieve symptoms.

Many elderly suffer from depression and loneliness. Significant life changes, cognitive decline, physical ailments, disability, a feeling of hopelessness, fear of death, anxiety, financial problems, isolating and withdrawing from friends and families are causes for this. Old age is also the time of losing friends, siblings and family and results in grief and further depression. The elderly person may become broody, introspective and prone to mood swings. Homoeopathy can help.

Other common maladies affecting the aged include vision problems like macular degeneration and cataracts, hearing impairment, constipation, urinary incontinence, prostate enlargement, itchy dry skin, indigestion and vertigo. It is worth considering a homoeopathic approach before venturing onto conventional treatments with their detrimental side effects.

Homoeopathy in Geriatrics has an edge over conventional therapy since it is able to treat and manage most conditions at every phase of life by tapping into a person's self-healing mechanisms. The approach is individually based, treating the individual person with her/his unique group of symptoms and ensures a holistic path in the management of the problem. The Homoeopath will ensure that the elderly person eats a balanced diet, remains mentally and physically active, goes for regular check-ups, keeps a safe environment to prevent accidents and falls and retains a positive outlook towards life. Ultimately homoeopathic remedies boost the immune system, promote healing, exalt vitality, improve sleep, reduce muscle pain and stiffness and strengthen the heart. Homoeopathy ensures dignified ageing and promotes coping abilities.

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