



Hello Health, Good-bye GI Complaints

Swift & sweet relief—after a long trip down conventional medicine's primrose path

by AMY ROTHENBERG, ND, DHANP

When I got to work, I saw on my schedule the name of a patient I'd not seen for a decade. I love when long-ago patients return, and we pick up the thread of our relationship, much like old friends. I am heartened as a doctor to have such relationships built upon open communication, caring, and love.

"After that last remedy you gave me, I felt so good that I really didn't need to come back ... until now," Sally told me. The homeopathic remedy *Sepia* had done wonders for Sally ten years earlier, alleviating her menopause-related fatigue, depression, and constipation.



Fast forward to our current visit and the reason for it. Sally, now 63, explained: "About six months ago I began to have a sore throat. Well, it was not exactly a sore throat, more of an irritation ... but nothing helped it. I also had this little cough. Thing is, I didn't really feel sick in any overall kind of way at that time ... no tiredness, fever, mucus, or anything else." Over the weeks, however, she also began to experience nausea.

After about a month of these symptoms, Sally visited her conventional medical doctor, who suspected gastro-esophageal reflux (GERD) and prescribed the drug *Prilosec*®, a proton-pump inhibitor that reduces stomach acid. "I stopped taking it after a week or so, though. It didn't help my symptoms and I did not feel well on it at all, so I didn't see the point," Sally said.

Twists, turns, & troubles ...

At around the same time, Sally had developed a skin infection in the nail bed of her finger, which her doctor began treating with an antibiotic, then another antibiotic when the first one did not do the trick. After the second antibiotic, Sally's skin infection got better, but her throat symptoms worsened—and now she also had severe diarrhea, every day, several times, and sometimes in the middle of the night.

Sally was then diagnosed with severe gastritis (inflammation of the stomach lining) and put back on the *Prilosec*®, at a stronger dose. Her gastrointestinal and throat symptoms got better slowly over the next month or so, when she and her partner decided she was well enough to go on a long-awaited trip to India.

Trapped by turista

Sally did not do well in India. "Oh, I felt terrible," Sally said. "The diarrhea returned with a vengeance! I was bound to stay within a few blocks of the hotel at all times because I needed to use the facilities many times throughout the day."

By the time of our visit, Sally had been home for two months, had had several stool analyses to check for parasitic infection (all normal), had lost nearly 20 pounds (that she could not afford to lose), and was still struggling with daily diarrhea. She had been prescribed the powerful antibiotic *Flagyl*® and the anti-diarrheal drugs *Imodium*® and *Pepto Bismol*®. She was also taking a probiotic. But nothing seemed to help. The stool was watery and burned on evacuation but did not cause pain. There was no bleeding, hemorrhoids, cramping, or gassiness.

Sally's appetite was low, and her spirits were dropping. "I feel so weak ... and extremely tired," she lamented. She continued her work as a school counselor but was forced to drop down to half time. "I come home at lunchtime and just spend the rest of the day on the couch under a blanket. My appetite is nil. And I have no idea what I'm supposed to be eating

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to help myself anyway,” she said. “I’m always wearing extra layers, too, because I’m so chilly all the time.” Feeling chilly was usual for her, but worse now, as she was so thin, barely 100 pounds. Sally still had the original throat irritation, too, possibly from gastritis.

Wish you’d seen me sooner!

When patients recount stories such as Sally’s—where one or two seemingly simple symptoms get treated and then evolve into a cascade of many and oftentimes worse symptoms—my first thought is always, wow, sure wish you had come to see me earlier! Homeopathy and natural medicine, used early on, might have been able to nip those early symptoms in the bud, averting Sally’s downward health spiral and saving her much suffering. But people do what they will do, and we cannot legislate their choices. Had I done a better job at patient education initially (something I often speak to my students about), I do believe that Sally would have remembered to contact me earlier.

In any case, increasingly, patients come to me with stories like Sally’s. They are often taking a number of pharmaceuticals and have long and complicated medical histories. Part of my job is to tease out what is causing what (such as which symptoms are drug side effects and which are the natural progression of an illness), assess the current situation, and decide what to do next. By the time I saw Sally, her initial seemingly minor acute complaints had been going on so long that they had crossed over into a new, more troublesome chronic condition.

Worries, concerns, & anxieties

I asked Sally about the previous year to find out whether there had been any strong stressors that might have triggered her original symptoms. She shared a long, sad story of family dysfunction related to

an ailing aunt and uncle, her role with the cousins, and ongoing anxiety and feelings of hopelessness; indeed it had been an extraordinarily difficult year, both before and after the start of her troublesome symptoms.

As we discussed these things, Sally leaned in, asked numerous questions, and shared her deep worry and concern about her health condition. Her anxiety was palpable and constant. She was extremely worried about herself and what these symptoms might mean.

Some of the main remedies we think of in cases of people with ongoing diarrhea are *Arsenicum album*, *Veratrum album*, *China officinalis*, *Podophyllum*, and *Chamomilla*. In Sally’s case, I ruled out *China*, as she had no gas whatsoever; I ruled out *Chamomilla* as she had not become irritable or cranky; *Podophyllum* was a good choice but she did not have quite the urgency or intensity of the explosive stool associated with that remedy. If she had needed *Veratrum album*, I would have expected more destruction to the tissue in the rectal and anal area after such a long bout with diarrhea.

A remedy for Sally

So, I prescribed one dose of *Arsenicum album* 200c. This is one of our most common remedies when diarrhea results from food poisoning or a viral issue, or when there is initial underlying inflammation, as in Sally’s case (manifested by the throat irritation, gastritis, and nail bed infection). The attendant antibiotics likely wiped out Sally’s normal varied gut flora, which did not help matters. For me, the fact that she had burning with her stool, extreme chilliness, and pervasive anxiety confirmed the remedy *Arsenicum album*, since burning pains, chilliness, and anxiety are key indicators for this remedy. Sally’s anxiety was manifest in the way that she kept going over the

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minutiae of her story, sharing with me each fact from lots of different angles; she also kept questioning me, did I think this was something more serious? Had I ever seen this kind of thing before? As a naturopathic doctor doing homeopathy, I want all my patients to be good reporters, but there are some that are so focused on the details that I have come to understand that as a symptom itself, a symptom of heightened anxiety and worry. For a person needing *Arsenicum album*, their anxiety almost always revolves around their health. In addition, most people needing *Arsenicum album* are seeking emotional support from those around them—they need extra encouragement, as Sally did.

Some might wonder why I did not start with the remedy *Sepia*, which had served Sally so well in the past as a constitutional remedy. Had she come to me with a constellation of *Sepia* symptoms, I

would have done just that, but it was not the case. When a person needing *Sepia* is affected by gastrointestinal troubles, I expect to see symptoms related more to constipation than to diarrhea. And in the psycho-emotional realm, those needing *Sepia* tend more toward having a flat affect or depressed mood rather than active anxiety. Clearly, Sally no longer needed the constitutional remedy that had helped her previously; this can happen with some patients, especially when there are big changes in life or big stressors. It's appropriate to remember and keep track of the remedies we use for a person, as often we circle around and repeat a prescription, but only when it is relevant and indicated.

Natural measures

Sally and I also discussed using naturopathic approaches to help heal the upper gastrointestinal and throat irritation

Stomach Bug Gotcha?

Here's a handful of helpers for "turista," food poisoning, and the like

by HOMEOPATHY TODAY staff

Summertime BBQs, dining at new restaurants, and travels to exotic locales can be fun—except when they are marred by unexpected and unwanted trips to the bathroom with diarrhea (or vomiting).

For gastrointestinal troubles of short duration, you might try one of the remedies below in a 30c or 30X strength to help "soothe your stomach"—if your symptoms match. According to Timothy R. Dooley, MD, ND: "The main thing about treating patients with diarrhea is to not hesitate to give the remedy frequently and to keep giving it. In a more acute situation, the remedy might be given every 15 minutes or so, and in patients who are less acutely ill, every 3 to 4 hours. One handy rule is to give a dose after every diarrhea stool; in this way, the dosing is automatically decreased as the patient recovers."

If, however, you have been struggling with GI troubles for more than a few days and/or

your symptoms are very strong seek professional help! Remember, too, that you need to be replacing fluids (and electrolytes, especially potassium) in roughly the same volume that you are passing them. Make your own replacement drink according to Dr. Dooley's recipe: "clear fruit juice (low fiber, mixed 50-50 with water, plus 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon baking soda per quart."

5 HANDY HELPERS

• ***Arsenicum album***. Consider this remedy first when diarrhea is related to food poisoning, travel to unfamiliar places, and/or underlying inflammation. People needing it are extremely anxious, restless, chilly, and weak; they want

and inflammation, including taking the amino acid glutamine, which is known to help heal damaged mucous membrane tissue. I also encouraged her to use the botanical preparation deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL), which soothes the lining of the mucous membranes of the esophagus and the stomach. I switched her probiotic to one that contained a more diverse number and type of organisms and instructed her to eat some cultured food and bone broth each day, too. I was working to get her system repopulated with the correct and varied cultures that are so essential for good health in general and for gastrointestinal health in particular.

Hello to good health

The next morning after our meeting, Sally left me a message to say she'd had a normal bowel movement—for the first time in months. And much to her happiness and relief, *that was the end of the diarrhea*. I saw Sally a few more times over the following weeks and months, and she continued to have normal bowel movements.

Over time, Sally also regained her strength and the weight she'd lost, and her gastrointestinal inflammation and irritation slowly resolved. I believe this was a result of both the homeopathic treatment and the naturopathic supportive measures.

Sally continues to do well some years later. I love this story because it reflects the speed with which a homeopathic remedy can work—offering enduring improvement when conventional approaches were not helpful.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amy Rothenberg, ND, DHANP, practices in Connecticut www.nhcm.com, blogs for *Huffington Post* www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-rothenberg-nd/, and authored *The A Cappella Singer Who Lost Her Voice & Other Stories From Natural Medicine* www.amyrothenberg.com.

Founder and instructor at New England School of Homeopathy www.nesh.com, she's on the Board of American Association of Naturopathic Doctors and president of Massachusetts Society of Naturopathic Doctors. She raised three wonderful children with husband, Paul Herscu, ND, MPH, and spends non-working hours in the garden, in her art studio, and on the ballroom dance floor.

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company and reassurance. They may be intensely thirsty but will take only small sips of water. They can have vomiting and diarrhea simultaneously, along with cramping and burning sensations. They tend to feel worse after midnight or 1:00 a.m.

- **Veratrum album.** Someone needing this remedy is generally very cold, feels cold to the touch, and breaks out in a cold sweat, especially on the forehead. They are exhausted and feel as if they will faint from profuse, watery diarrhea and (possibly simultaneous) violent vomiting. The ongoing discharges exhaust the person's vitality as well as their tissues. They may want cold drinks even though they are chilly.

- **China officinalis.** Consider this remedy when a person has ongoing, painless diarrhea that leads to debility and exhaustion. They typically also experience much gas, rum-

bling, and gurgling in the digestive tract; their abdomen may be bloated and tight as a drum. It may feel as if food is not digesting well, and stools may contain undigested particles.

- **Podophyllum.** Consider this remedy for urgent, intense, explosive diarrhea; it is typically painless, very offensive, and worse at 4:00 a.m. and early morning. The stool may be green, yellow, or chalky. Diarrhea may be worse in hot weather and during teething of infants.

- **Chamomilla.** The person needing this remedy will likely be irritable, cranky, or spiteful. They may have foul-smelling, greenish diarrhea and complain of gas pains (though passing gas does not relieve the pain). They are extremely oversensitive to pain and find it unbearable. They whine a lot and are restless; children needing this remedy want to be carried.

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