



# Tying the knot

*Homeopathic matchmaking? Overcoming the*

by AMY ROTHENBERG, ND

A few years back, my husband Paul Herscu and I were invited to six weddings in one spring. I officiated at one and served as a witness in another; the rest were a mix of friends of our kids and kids of our friends! In all, it was a lovely time of optimism and celebration and spending time with people we love. It got me thinking about the institution of marriage and why there has been an overall decrease demographically in the number of people tying the knot. There are many reasons for it, including unemployment, underemployment, and a shift in attitudes about independence, cohabitation, and parenting, to name a few. Of course, there are many ways to live a life, and I know plenty of very happy single people.

*Knot*

*'ear of commitment!*





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That said, over the years I have had a number of patients who claim to *want* to marry, or at very least partner, yet, it doesn't happen. Some say they have not found the right person, others declare they are just having too much fun to settle down, and still others assert they are not financially stable enough to commit to another person.

### Afraid to commit

And then there's the group of people who, for whatever reason, seem simply unable to take the next step; they are filled with fear and anxiety even thinking about the idea of actually committing themselves to another person. This is the group I'd like to talk about.

I cannot say that anyone has come to my office with "fear of commitment" as a chief complaint. But many a person has arrived at my door for help with some other ailment, and as their story unfolded, I saw that this inability to commit—a sort of Peter Pan syndrome, a resistance or an inability to mature—was central to their narrative. I have seen it in men and in women, in 20-, 30- or 40-somethings; the age does not seem to matter.

### A preschool teacher's predicament

One 34-year-old patient comes to mind. Julia was a preschool teacher who loved working with little ones and was content in many ways. She came to see me for chronic sore throats and earaches. It seemed she caught whatever was going around the preschool room, though one would think she had had enough years as a teacher to have built up more immunity. She could expect to be sick every month with something or other, and she often had to stay home from work until she felt better.

I spent time understanding the way Julia got her sore throats and what they felt like. They almost always felt better with warm drinks, and they were accom-

panied each time by swollen glands. In fact, the glands in her neck stayed perpetually indurated like hard little peas in a chain, even when she felt well. A low-grade fever accompanied her illnesses, which made her feel tired and emotionally overwhelmed. Earaches would really lay her out with pain and tenderness, and resulted in her taking antibiotics once or twice a year. She was a little overweight and struggled somewhat with constipation but was otherwise in good health.

### Overwhelmed at the prospect of love

When we got to the part of the case-taking interview where I asked if she had any emotional issues, any tendency for depression, anxiety, or irritability, Julia's eyes widened and big tears fell from them. She said she was shy in some ways and often felt nervous, especially around new or unfamiliar people, and she had anxiety around dating and around men in general. Yet she yearned to be married and to have kids of her own. It took considerable courage and effort for her to date a man, but each time, after some weeks or months (especially if he seemed particularly interested in her), she would withdraw, break it off, and run the other way.

Sometimes we see this kind of anxiety in a person who has been abused or had a bad experience in an earlier relationship,

but Julia had actually never been in a relationship of more than a few months' duration and none with any distasteful memories. Julia's upbringing had been rather unremarkable and there had been no abuse. She just felt overwhelmed by the prospect of love, being vulnerable to another person, and the enormity of a commitment such as marriage.

Julia also struggled with indecision and the inability to make choices, whether it be a gift for a friend or what to order at a restaurant. Because of this, she always ordered the same thing when she ate out, and she had a system for rotating her clothing so that she'd not have to make a decision each morning. Her job suited her well as she knew what to expect; there was a clear daily routine—good for the little ones, but also good for her.

### Remedy for a shrinking violet

When we have a person who, because of a lack of internal confidence and self-understanding, must in a way shrink themselves instead of stretch out *into* the world, we think of the remedy *Baryta carbonica*. Many times men or women who need this remedy will work to blend in with their surroundings and do whatever they can to *not* be noticed. This sort of shape-shifting is easy for people needing *Baryta carbonica* because their sense of self is not well developed. (In fact, this is a remedy that often benefits children





who lag behind in physical, mental, or emotional development; they may be slow learning to walk, talk, or read, and be fearful of strangers.) That said, you can have an adult who needs this remedy who is professional, self-supporting, and not especially childlike. But when you dig a little deeper, you can see the qualities I have described.

An experience that often happens to me when I am treating someone who needs *Baryta carbonica* is that I repeatedly look down at the age of the patient written on the intake form. Indeed, this was the case with Julia. I kept thinking she was 19 or 20, not the 34 years old she was. She looked more youthful than her age, and her complaints and her posture and attitude were that of a younger person too.

And her physical ailments—sore throats and earaches—are similar to what kids get, with fevers and swollen glands. Julia's physical concerns were a perfect confirmation for this remedy choice, as *Baryta carbonica's* symptom profile includes recurrent tonsillitis that comes on after every cold, along with large, swollen, hardened glands, especially in the throat. This remedy also fit Julia's enormous lack of self-confidence and irresolution (i.e., indecision), especially about small matters.

### Considering possibilities

Whenever I am thinking about *Baryta carbonica* for a patient, the other remedies that come to mind are *Thuja* and *Silica* because of similarities to *Baryta carbonica*. People who need *Thuja* also can lack inner self-definition, self-love, and acceptance. They can be indecisive or try to blend with the people they are around. Sometimes when I am finished with an hour-and-a-half initial intake and feel like I have no sense of the person I was just with, I realize, ah, it's because

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## Stalled Development

### Meet *Baryta carbonica*

**The homeopathic remedy *Baryta carbonica* is made from the mineral barium carbonate, also known as *witherite*. Below are some its key indications, according to various homeopathic materia medica sources:**

Mental or physical immaturity are nearly always prominent in [people needing] this remedy. ... In many other cases of *Baryta carbonica*, however, the mental function is normal, but the emotional level is very compromised, leaving the patient insecure, irresolute, horribly anxious, and with strong feelings of inferiority.

~Roger Morrison, *Desktop Guide to Keynotes and Confirmatory Symptoms*

Those needing this remedy are typically shy and nervous, especially with people they don't know, finding social situations difficult. Small children hide behind their mothers or the furniture when strangers are around, while older children slink around the edges of gatherings, feeling embarrassed and out of place.

They lack self-confidence and are either emotionally immature (at any age) or find it difficult to grow up into their next phase of life, and especially to make the transition from childhood to adulthood.

They are studious but have difficulty remembering and are easily distracted, which makes studying, especially for exams, a struggle. Children may lag behind or be unable to concentrate or take in new concepts (this includes bright children who have come up against a learning block). This remedy is especially useful for children who are stuck and not living up to their own potential—either mentally, emotionally, or physically

It can also help elderly people who

may seem to go through a second childhood and appear to those around them to be surprisingly scatterbrained—forgetful and indecisive—and sluggish, physically as well as emotionally and mentally.

~Miranda Castro, *Homeopathic Guide to Stress*

I consider it to be one of the greatest throat and flu remedies. ... I have never yet seen a patient needing *Baryta carb* without [swollen] glands in the neck. They always have swollen glands and often have chronically enlarged tonsils. You look at their tonsils when they are apparently feeling quite well and they are still chronically enlarged.

~Margery Blackie, *Classical Homeopathy*

Specially indicated in children and old age. ... Children *late in learning to walk, talk, and read*. ... Old people, often resulting from apoplexy, lose their memory, start to act thoughtless and foolish, and have the idea of being laughed at, talked about, watched or mocked.

Tardiness of development of organs; a single organ fails to mature (e.g., genital organs too small).

Great *sensitivity to cold* air and susceptibility to catching cold. Chilly persons. Worse from the *feet* becoming *cold*.

Offensive *foot sweat* (skin of toes excoriated; destruction of shoes).

Sensation of cobweb on the face.

~Frans Vermeulen, *Synoptic Materia Medica*



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they need *Thuja*! With *Thuja*, however, I expect to see more self-loathing, even in otherwise seemingly well-adjusted people; whereas with someone needing *Baryta carbonica*, such as Julia, I see more a lack of sense of self.

The outward symptoms and physical ailments of people needing *Silica*—such as recurrent colds, ear infections, tonsillitis, glandular swellings, and offensive foot sweat—can look an awful lot like *Baryta carbonica* symptoms. Likewise, *Silica*'s psycho-emotional traits—timidity, lack of confidence, and being conscientious about small things—can echo *Baryta carbonica*'s. There is a sense of weakness that manifests in the symptom profile of both of these remedies on many levels. But people who need *Silica* are stronger within; they have more grit. Even though they may not immediately let on about this or push their own opinion, you know that deep down they have one!

### A good fit for Julia

For Julia, I prescribed a dose of *Baryta carbonica* 200c with the confidence that it would help decrease the number, severity, and duration of her upper respiratory tract infections and earaches, and with the hope that it might help her to stand tall and say yes to life a bit more and not shrink away from men or commitment!

I also talked with Julia about building her immunity with probiotics and cultured foods to support gastrointestinal flora. We know more and more about the immune system and how a large portion of it arises from the gut; by diversifying and increasing gut flora, we can support proper immune function. I also encouraged her to remove refined sugars from her diet, as we know they depress

immune function. I asked her to add fish oil supplements as well as vitamin D, as they are both immune-system boosting, and because her vitamin D level was low based on a screening blood test.

Sure enough, six weeks passed and Julia did not get sick. This was a good start.

Another two months passed where she had one cold, but was able to work through it relatively easily and did not develop a fever. All good! I gave her another dose of *Baryta carbonica* 200c at that time, as she felt she might be coming down with something.

### Transformed & engaged!

Eight months after our first visit, Julia came to see me with someone she introduced as her fiancé! I was taken aback, though I didn't show it. I was thrilled for her. It was someone she'd dated a few years back who she really liked. "I decided, to hell with it. I'm just going to call him and see what happens," she told me. That kind of confidence and self-assuredness was new and welcome, and well, that really worked out!

This part of practice is fun and satisfying. Not only was my patient better physically from bothersome complaints (her sore throats and earaches were few and far between and she'd not needed antibiotics since starting homeopathic treatment), but she was now deeply happy and connected to another person in a meaningful and rewarding relationship.

I do not believe Julia even thinks about the homeopathic treatment with *Baryta carbonica* as having had any impact on this level of her being, and that does not matter. I know. I've seen this happen on too many occasions in my 30 years of

practice to chalk it up to coincidence. And as she and her husband plan to start a family, I would not be surprised if this additional responsibility and leap to another level of maturity were a big stress for Julia that caused her well-being to take a bit of a hit. If so, I hope she seeks me out for further support, because I think homeopathy can come in and help her again.

### One size does not fit all

Not all people with fear of commitment in relationships will need homeopathic *Baryta carbonica*. A person with very low self-esteem, such as someone needing *Anacardium*, may feel that they are truly unlovable and might find it difficult to commit for that reason. Or someone with deep feelings of shame who feels that they are always at fault, such as someone needing *Staphysagria*, could have a difficult time committing to and maintaining a relationship. Of course, every person's situation is different, and the totality of their symptoms—physical, mental, emotional, and general—would need to fit the remedy choice.

But for this particular kind of shrinking away from the next step (such as a commitment in emotional relationships) as we saw in Julia, who seemed younger than her age and as if her development had somehow stalled—*Baryta carbonica* is tops!

One last little thought here about marriage. I often joke that when I retire, I am going to open a matchmaking business based on constitutional remedy types. I can call it Homeo-Mate!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amy Rothenberg, ND, is happy to say she's about to celebrate her 30th wedding anniversary! She practices in Connecticut [www.nhcm.com](http://www.nhcm.com), blogs for Huffington Post [www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-rothenberg-nd/](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amy-rothenberg-nd/), and authored *The A Cappella Singer Who Lost Her Voice & Other Stories*

From *Natural Medicine* [www.amyrothenberg.com](http://www.amyrothenberg.com). She is founder and lead instructor at the New England School of Homeopathy [www.nesh.com](http://www.nesh.com) and president of the Massachusetts Society of Naturopathic Doctors. She raised three wonderful children with husband, Paul Herscu ND, MPH, and enjoys gardening, working in her art studio, and ballroom dancing.

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