

# The Homoeopathic Treatment of Pain in Animals

From a talk given by Mr. Jeremy Edwards, B.Vet.M., MRCVS,  
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## The Control of pain

Any animal owner should be interested in the control of pain. The Oxford Dictionary describes pain as "an unpleasant feeling caused by injury or disease of the body, but also mental suffering." 'Suffering' is a very strong word, important because some species of animals can't actually show you pain that easily. With horses, for example, it is quite easy to assess the level of pain because the pulse-rate will give you some idea of the amount of pain they are in. Unfortunately with animals like reptiles - for example, tortoises - it is very difficult to appreciate that they can suffer pain. I have cut many tortoises' toenails over the years and if one cuts where the quick is, the animal will react quite dramatically, so every animal has the capacity to feel pain and it is very important that we try to control this.

With orthodox medicine, the traditional way to control pain is with powerful analgesics or steroids and these can quite often have devastating effects: I have actually seen animals killed by long-term doses of steroids and anti-inflammatories so the Homoeopathic approach is a very attractive idea.

It is worth remembering that pain is a defence mechanism of the body. It is telling us that we have injured ourselves or there is some other problem, so it is not always the right thing to suppress it totally because the animal may then go back to exercising normally and cause further damage. Where possible, the owner or the Vet should try and put himself in the animal's position and imagine how that animal feels: you will then have a much better appreciation of the amount of pain that it might be in.

## Long-term or short-term pain

Chronic long-term pain is obviously of much greater significance than acute or short-term pain. If we bang our elbow on the wall, it hurts for a short time and we get over it with or without homoeopathic interruption. But if you have a dog with arthritis, for example, the amount of suffering the dog can go through

day after day, untreated, can be quite substantial. So it is important to consider whether it is a long-term problem or a short-term one.

## If only they could speak

The character of pain is a difficult thing with animals. Kent's Repertory, which is a big dictionary of symptoms for human homoeopathic medicine has probably 80 pages detailing all sorts of different pains. It is easier for a Doctor as the patient can relate their symptoms exactly but the animal can tell you nothing and you have to go a lot on observation. I think it is true to say of animals that you can only classify it as severe or mild pain, and you can also consider whether the onset is sudden or gradual. There is, in fact, a lot of guess-work involved.

The localisation of the pain is very important. General areas, such as the whole of the spine, are easier to appreciate whereas specific areas are not so easy. It is sometimes quite difficult to pinpoint the exact area of pain in an animal. Many homoeopathic medicines help pain that gets better when the animal is distracted: the classic case of an animal being in a lot of pain but, when it is presented at the Vet's surgery, there is no sign of pain and the animal just wants to go home. The animal has forgotten about it because of the worry of seeing the Vet.

We also have the problem of the animal that is off-colour and quiet: is the animal ill or just in low-grade pain? An interesting thing with Homoeopathy is that certain remedies have a laterality to them, a certain preference to sides of the body, just as they will be subject to aggravations at certain times of the day. Obviously, this is easy when it comes to the limbs because the dog is either lame on the left or the right side, but when it comes to the body, it is not easy to tell which side of the body the pain is emanating from. It is useful to try and find if the pain is localised in a small area or over a much bigger area, for certain remedies are characterised by small focal areas of pain whereas other remedies are characterised by a bigger general area of pain.

### First-aid at home

I will go through quickly the common remedies that we have at home, common because we find they commonly work and that is why we have them. I must stress, however, that it is the owner's responsibility to consult a Vet if you have an animal that is sick or in pain and it is not getting better. However, in a first-aid capacity, there is a lot you can be doing with remedies from your own medicine cupboard.

### ARNICA MONTANA

This is a very old medicine; in fact it goes back to the Romans and the Greeks. Some European explorers found the Peruvian Indians using it when they went to South America. The pain we have to associate with *Arnica* is bruising. If you have a bruise, the first thing you reach for is *Arnica* and the sooner the better. If you leave it for some time, the effectiveness will be less. It has a wide range of action, antiseptic properties and it will combat infection. The classic usage of *Arnica* in veterinary medicine is for routine spaying and neutering.

We give *Arnica* to animals that are going for major, if routine, operations both before and after - *Arnica* 6 or 30 for five days before and five days after - and nine times out of ten, the effect is dramatic. I notice, as a surgeon in the operating theatre, that there is much less haemorrhage. Bleeding from the tissues is a real nuisance in surgery because it obliterates the field of view and is a constant bane of the surgeon's work so, if you can give *arnica* and reduce the bleeding, it speeds the operation and the convalescent period seems to be much shorter as well. If your dog is going in for orthopaedic surgery, *Arnica* is also very important because, no matter how good the orthopaedic surgeon, repairing a leg or any other orthopaedic operation is a very brutal process so *Arnica*, perhaps in the higher potency of 200, can be given in three doses before the operation.

*Arnica* is also available in a lotion or ointment and is a very useful remedy but it reputedly should not be used on open wounds.

### BELLIS PERENNIS

This is the Common Daisy and again it is for bruising, specifically for abdominal or pelvic bruising; again with the spayed bitch where the pelvic organs are involved. What we tend to do is to use *Arnica* first before the operation and

*Bellis* after the operation: two remedies for trauma and for bruising.

### HYPERICUM

This is St. John's Wort and if you asked a Homoeopath about a painkiller, apart from *Arnica*, *Hypericum* is the one that would come to mind. The specialist area for this remedy is the nerves and it is very good for crushed injuries. If you shut your fingers in the car door, *Hypericum* is wonderful for the effect on the nerves, characterised by that tingling numbness and burning pain in the extremities. It is useful in conditions that are very, very painful. One of the older homoeopaths called Helmuth has actually likened it to morphine in its effect. It is characterised by pains that are worse for cold and if you go out in cold weather, the fingers will throb more.

An animal will show pain more in the cold and damp, it will be sensitive to touch and a dog may nip you because of the pain. It is also very good for spinal injuries and dachshunds, which suffer from back problems, can be given *Hypericum* as a painkiller and it will hopefully speed their convalescence.

Sometimes dairy cows, very often due to poor breeding practices, seem to have tremendous trouble having their calves; they get bruising and nerve damage within the pelvis and here *Hypericum* is very useful with *Arnica*.

### LEDUM

Marsh Tea is very useful for the prevention of Tetanus. It is good for puncture wounds, often combined with *Hypericum*, for lacerated wounds with an excess of pain, and especially useful with tissues rich in nerve endings.

### CALENDULA

Pot Marigold is a remedy where the pain is out of all proportion to the injury. It is used very often as a lotion or ointment applied to wounds and abrasions and is soothing, healing and antiseptic. It is used in human medicine for bedsores and also in Chiropody for foot problems.

### HAMAMELIS

Witch Hazel is very good for open wounds that tend to ooze dark blood and for passive bleeding; a useful painkilling agent in this situation. There is a certain degree of weakness in the patient because of the blood loss.

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## STAPHISAGRIA

Another remedy of great use. One of its key words is resentment and it seems to be the case that sometimes, when you have animals in for surgery, they will be very resentful towards you and the owner. If you have the feeling that they are, understandably, resentful about the surgery and if they have a lot of pain after the operation, then *Staphisagria* is very well worth trying to relieve the discomfort and to make the animal happier. These animals are characterised by being much worse for touch and if you try to pacify them by touching or stroking, again they will probably nip you. Give them *Staphisagria* and leave them quiet in a warm hospital cage and they will settle down.

## BISMUTH

One of the troubles with Homoeopathy is the mass of information and, the more you read, the more you come across but some things stick in the mind. *Bismuth* is recommended in cases where there is so much pain that the patient is showing convulsive gagging. This is often applicable to Yorkshire Terriers when they go in for an operation. Smaller dogs, such as poodles, show pain to an extreme degree and become hysterical and, then, this is a remedy which is worth considering.

## CHAMOMILLA

Another classical remedy, always associated with teething in babies. This is an easy remedy to spot because these animals cannot bear the pain; they are uncontrollable but, as soon as you pick them up, they seem to settle down. They are very sensitive to stimuli, noises etc., and they can be spiteful: you can get bitten by a *Chamomilla* patient.

## COLOCYNTH

Finally, amongst the many remedies for pain in the *Materia Medica*, *Colocynth* or Bitter Cucumber is an interesting one. If you were silly enough to eat a Bitter Cucumber, it would give you violent colic because they are very irritant, and it is therefore very good for spasmodic colic. Horses come to mind when talking about colic but, although *Colocynth* is the first remedy one thinks of, you should not go straight to it without considering the whole animal and what is going on and how the animal shows this colic. If you have got the typical hunched-up appearance, as it tries to pull its back legs up under it, then this is quite characteristic of *Colocynth*. They tend to be worse for eating and drinking. Some horses are silly enough to try and eat when they have colic but they are much worse afterwards, if they are allowed to do so.

They are often better for movement: the old idea was to walk a horse with colic but now it is thought that it is not a good thing because it tires the horse and it becomes even worse. Orthodox medicine can be very dogmatic and there are vogues with such things as tonsils and grommets. In veterinary medicine, there are vogues like walking and not walking the animal. You have to take into account that each animal is an individual and treat it as such. There are no guarantees with Homoeopathy and it will not work in every case but, the more experienced you become, the better results you get.

## CASE HISTORIES

Gypsy is a Shire Mare weighing about 900Kg and absolutely massive. The problem for her owners is that, although she is not nasty, she wouldn't pick up her feet to be examined. She had been lame in the left foreleg for about 14 days and she has a history of laminitis, which is always a worry with horses. Not being able to pick up her feet is most unsatisfactory. She is standing in a barn and cannot go out because the fields are a mire of mud: the bedding is kept clean but she is lame.

I was called to see her because the owners' orthodox Vet had been trying to help but could only give painkillers, which made her much happier but were not curing anything. We talked to the owners first and asked about Gypsy's characteristics. She's a greedy eater, quite energetic, has an average thirst, very friendly, very intelligent, easily frightened, affectionate, has a keen sense of hearing and

smell, and is a good doer, which means that she puts on weight easily: she's not a thin, lean type. The owners said: "the use of violence offends her and she refuses to perform." If she doesn't want to pick up her foot, there is no way that she will let you do it but, overall, she is a very nice animal.

It is rather intimidating standing behind her for if she chose to kick you, it does not bear thinking what the results would be. However, mindful of what a nice animal she is, we must help her in every way possible with Homoeopathy. What are we looking for?

For a constitutional remedy, I came up with *Phosphorus* because she seemed to have a lot of the *Phosphorus* type about her. I normally say to owners, whether I am treating a gerbil or a horse, the dose is one tablet. That is all you need in Homoeopathy—a quantitative remedy, not a quantitative stimulus—but, in her case, her mouth is so big that I did suggest that she have three tablets in a carrot, all at once. There was certainly signs of infection in the feet but it was difficult to pinpoint where it was. In veterinary medicine, we often have to resort to local remedies, using it for its local characteristics. She resented touch, so we gave her *Hepar sulph.* in an appropriate strength to help with any abscess or infection. Certainly the report over the next week was good. She did seem to improve, not completely, but she was a lot brighter in herself and seemed much more willing to move.

One of the problems is 'blocks to cure'. Homoeopathy will work optimally if you remove all the blocks to cure—the way of life if you like. One of her problems was that she was cooped up in a small barn. It was a fairly big stable but not a good way of life for an animal of her size to be standing all day in a confined space. There were not many options. About ten days later, the owner had noticed what seemed to be a developing problem underneath the sole of the foot, a hint of Thrush infection. Again, I went out and saw her and I felt that *Kreosote*, used specifically to treat Thrush, would be useful. This remedy did seem to have an effect. The case is still going on and there are certain other remedies that I have in mind. *Rhus tox* is one because she seems to be worse in the cold and wet, and certainly stiff at rest, though she begins to loosen up with time when they walk her around the farm twice a day.

The second case is Max, an 11-month-old German Shepherd dog. I went to see him in June 1994 for sudden-onset lameness. Max is a very nice dog, although not my favourite breed as I have met some very anti-social ones. He was very lame, off his food, and a very unhappy dog. It is difficult with a dog of that age to know what is going on but it seemed to me that this might be a case of Panosteitis, which was confirmed after an X-ray. It is an interesting condition, about which not a lot is known, but the books say that the cause is possibly a virus. Dogs often grow out of it and, at about 15 to 18 months, they get better, but Max needed help at the time.

To give a dog of that age the recommended treatment, which is steroids or aspirin-type drugs in high dosage for 3 or 4 months, was certainly not a desirable prospect so we decided to try some homoeopathy.

Max was also a *Phosphorus* type, bright, friendly and extrovert. He was given *Phosphorus* as his constitutional remedy. It is often useful to combine a more local remedy with the constitutional, so he was also given *Eupatorium*, which is characterised by pain in the bones and pain on touch. If you squeezed the long bones of his legs, he would yelp and the limbs were tender and hot. Over the next 5 days, there was a dramatic response though not so dramatic as with painkillers, where all you are doing is suppressing the signs and not curing the condition. But this was certainly a clinical cure and, subsequently, I have given him *Cal. phos* which is of use for bones in growing dogs, and this has given added support and the condition has not recurred since. *BHA*.

*Transcribed from cassette by M.J.A.*

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