

Treating Obesity with Homeopathy

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Abstract: The homeopathic treatment of obesity is discussed. The causes of obesity – genetic, environmental/lifestyle, psychological – are identified. Repertory rubrics relevant to both mental and physical aspects of obesity are identified, and materia medica of homeopathic remedies indicated for obesity is discussed.

Keywords: obesity, homeopathic treatment of; obesity, causation of; obesity, materia medica for; obesity, rubrics pertaining to.

Obesity is the new century's public health burden, like tuberculosis was at the beginning of the last century and nicotine addiction was at its end. Obesity, together with its precursor overweight, is so prevalent, afflicting almost two out of every three adults in this country and about one out of every five children, that it is considered to be an epidemic.

Obesity and eating disorders should be discussed together because they have the same roots, the same causes. Obesity and eating disorders are complex, multifactorial, chronic diseases that develop from an interaction of genotype and environment. (Please see related article, Feingold E, "Treating People with Eating Disorders with Homeopathy," *American Journal of Homeopathic Medicine*, 2005, 98:174-8.)

The causes of obesity and eating disorders can be grouped under three broad categories. First, there is genetic predisposition. People who develop either obesity or an eating disorder (or both) have likely inherited a vulnerable brain chemistry that makes them susceptible to profound changes in energy metabolism. The neurotransmitter involved in feeding and eating is serotonin.

Second, there are environmental or lifestyle causes, or as it is sometimes described, the socio-cultural context of disease causation. It is likely that obesity and the eating disorders are simply different responses to our super-abundant, out-of-control food culture. Obesity is a lifestyle disease because it can resolve with lifestyle changes. Our way of life, our lifestyle, is killing us.

Third, we have psychological causation. In this category obesity results from the traumas one has experienced that have left a mark on one's psyche.

Such traumas can include death, divorce, financial ruin, and other deeply scarring personal events. Today we recognize that being bullied or teased fits into this category as well.

The twentieth century public health contribution to the feeding/eating of the population was to eliminate deficiencies – of food quantity and quality, iron, iodine, folic acid, etc. The twenty-first century public health contribution will be to eliminate excesses – of food quantity (portions), saturated and trans fats, and most prominently, sugar, while succeeding once again to link physical activity (energy output) with calories ingested (energy intake). This essential link had been a normal state of affairs for thousands of years until our sedentary lifestyle took over during the latter part of the last century.

Note: The definition of obesity is based on the body mass index (BMI), which considers weight in relation to height. It's not a perfect measure, there being some problems, especially with particularly muscular people. We would rather measure body fat, but it's too difficult and cumbersome; so BMI is the best proxy we have. The formula for BMI is wt (kg) divided by ht (m) squared, or, wt (lb) X 704.5 divided by ht (inches) squared.

A BMI of 18.5-25 is normal. A BMI of less than 18.5 is found in anorexia nervosa and indicates malnutrition. A BMI of 25-29.5 indicates overweight. Persons suffering from bulimia nervosa will often have BMIs in this category. A BMI of 30-39.5 indicates obesity. A BMI in this category is associated with higher than normal morbidity and mortality rates. Persons suffering from binge eating disorder and night eating syndrome will often have BMIs in this category (or

even higher). A BMI of 40 and greater is 'morbid' obesity or 'super' obesity and is associated with very high morbidity and mortality rates.

Note: If you or a family member or your patient suffers from obesity as a result of compulsive overeating or binge eating disorder (BED), you may want to investigate Food Addicts Anonymous (called FAA), a '12-step' program that has the highest cure rate for BED. You may learn about FAA at www.foodaddictsanonymous.org. You may learn more about the food program of FAA from reading *Food Addiction: The Body Knows* by Kay Sheppard. You may order this book at the FAA website.

Studying the rubrics in our repertories is one of the best ways, in my opinion, to learn about the great variability in symptoms found in sick people. Learning the rubrics allows us to take a patient-focused rather than disease-focused approach.

Let us start with the MIND section of our repertory.

Note: The following is based on *The Complete Repertory* by Roger Van Zandvoort (1996) and the *Synthesis Repertory* by Schroyens as found in *Radar* 9.1 (2005).

Mind, eating, after, agg

People with obesity often describe an aggravation in emotional and physical symptoms after eating. Since guilt is a powerful aggravator, this rubric (69 remedies) may be a proxy for 'guilt after eating' or 'reproaching oneself after eating,' a rubric our repertory lacks so far. I use this rubric together with 'Mind, reproaching oneself' for those people who express guilt after eating.

Mind, anxiety, eating, after

Some people with obesity describe anxiety after eating (42 remedies) which may also be connected to feeling guilty.

Mind, helplessness, feeling of

This rubric (66 remedies) suits some people with obesity who tell you, "I just can't lose weight no matter what I do."

Mind, despair of recovery

This rubric (74 remedies) suits all too many people with obesity.

Mind, sadness, eating, after

This rubric (29 remedies) is important to consider in persons who exhibit both obesity along with depression.

Mind, sadness, with obesity

The sole remedy (at level 1) in this rubric is the homeopathic preparation of the popular herb *Ginkgo biloba*. Although its proving was done in 1933, it is not commonly used in homeopathy. It is a remedy that is used for suppressed anger with desire to tear up something. Its principal symptoms include urinary complaints, numbness, irrational fears, and burning pains in the pharynx and stomach.

Note: Information on the homeopathic preparation of *Ginkgo biloba* comes from Julian, OA, *Materia Medica of New Homeopathic Remedies*, Beaconsfield Publishers Ltd., U.K., 1979.

Now we consider the "Mind;Delusions" rubrics that are sometimes suitable for obese people with body image distortion and body dissatisfaction. People with obesity may manifest body image distortion and body dissatisfaction, but generally to a lesser degree than those with eating disorders. In a medical study reported in *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2005,37:120-127) teasing by fathers was found to be a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction while teasing by mothers was a predictor of depression. In obese adolescents and adults body dissatisfaction and depression are common co-morbidities.

Mind, delusions, body enlarged and body expanded (19 remedies)

Mind, delusions, body parts enlarged (18 remedies)

Mind, size, incorrect judge of (7 remedies)

Now we can go to the Stomach section of our repertory.

Stomach, appetite, constant

This rubric (18 remedies) is appropriate for certain people with obesity who engage in 'grazing,' a kind of feeding behavior that takes place all day long. Four remedies occur at level 2: *Kali bichromicum*, *Mercurius solubilis*, *Natrum carbonicum*, *Natrum muriaticum*.

Kali bichromicum

Fat and light-haired people may benefit from *Kali bichromicum* if they are conservative, doing everything in life in a regular, routine manner, always by the book. They feel better when eating. Although they tend to do everything, including eating, according to a rigid timetable, they will convince themselves that they must eat many more times a day, as often as once an hour, just in order to stave off feelings of faintness (which they will call hypoglycemia). They tend to desire beer, which has a high chromium con-

tent, the trace mineral essential for the metabolic actions of insulin. *Kali bichromicum* is often used for people with recurrent sinus infections.

Stomach, appetite, ravenous

Ravenous or canine appetite is a synonym for bingeing. This is the prominent rubric (234 remedies) for persons who have obesity associated with bingeing and binge eating disorder.

Note: Definitions of all the eating disorders are contained in Feingold E, "Treating People with Eating Disorders with Homeopathy," *American Journal of Homeopathic Medicine*, 2005, 98:174-8.

Stomach, appetite, increased, night

This rubric (28 remedies) describes the person with obesity associated with night eating disorder. *Phosphorus* is our most important remedy for this syndrome, and indeed is the sole remedy (at level 1) under **Stomach, appetite, insatiable, night**. Use *Phosphorus* when your patient consumes most of his/her calories at night, especially when he/she fits the prominent constitutional symptoms of *Phosphorus*: expressive, creative, excitable, better for touch and rubbing, tendency to bleed from wounds or any orifice, rapid growth in children, and a history of respiratory tract ailments.

Now we turn to Generalities.

Generalities, Obesity

This rubric (148 remedies) contains the important remedies for obesity.

***Anacardium* (3)**

The *Anacardium* patient is weak-willed and lacks self-confidence. She tends towards perfectionism. She is easily offended. She may be abusive, aggressive, and destructive to her family members. The telltale symptom for using *Anacardium* is when the patient expresses that she has two parts, one good and one bad, the angel and the devil, sitting on her shoulders, telling her what to eat. Although this sounds bizarre, in my experience it is not unusual in patients with obesity as a result of bulimia nervosa.

***Antimonium crudum* (2)**

Antimonium crudum is useful for people with excessive appetites and gross overeating of food, not sweets. The overeating is triggered by emotional upsets (called emotional eating). This remedy is suitable for persons with obesity as a result of compulsive overeating (binge eating disorder). Constitutional symptoms are: desire for acidic foods; thickly-coated, white tongue; aversion to being looked at,

touched, or washed; worse from sun, overheating, and radiant heat.

***Calcarea carbonica* (3)**

Calcarea carbonica is useful for people, especially sedentary ones, with abdominal obesity. Constitutional symptoms are: craving of sweets, carbohydrates, eggs; many fears, much perspiration, slow learning to walk and talk, weakness of bones and teeth, placid, plodding, clumsy.

***Capsicum* (3)**

Capsicum annum (red cayenne pepper) is useful for people who overeat (binge eating disorder) to the point of feeling like the abdomen is bursting.

***Ferrum metallicum* (3)**

Ferrum metallicum is useful for people who have emaciation, weakness, coldness, anemia. They tend to binge on large quantities of food alternating with loss of appetite, and periodic vomiting (bulimia nervosa). Eventually, their bingeing may cause obesity.

***Graphites* (3)**

Graphites is useful for overweight people with sluggish metabolism and constipation along with rough, dry, cracked skin. It is especially useful for menopausal women. It is also used for women with symptoms of polycystic ovary syndrome (scanty or absent menstruation associated with obesity). Constitutional symptoms are: intellectually slow, shy, dislikes sweet and salty foods.

***Kali carbonicum* (2)**

Kali carbonicum people are chilly in both the physical and emotional realms. They are unemotional, 'hard' like steel, with a strong sense of duty and responsibility. *Kali carbonicum*, like other important remedies, is useful for both ends of the eating spectrum (anorexia nervosa to obesity). *Kali carbonicum* is the sole remedy under the rubric, "Stomach, indigestion, old people, obesity; inclined to."

***Lycopodium* (2)**

Lycopodium is for people who overeat and have cravings for sweets. They complain that they are still hungry even after finishing a meal. They tend to have indigestion after eating late at night, with complaints of bloating and gas. Constitutional symptoms are: insecure, low self-esteem, detached air, bossy tyrant at home, fear of being alone, fear of failure.

***Natrum muriaticum* (3)**

Natrum muriaticum is for people who are easily hurt from real and perceived insults and rejections. She (or he) tends to keep a grudge and dwells on

past insults. She suffers from guilty feelings and feels responsible even when she's not. She is emotionally hysterical, has secret crying and secret grief, and craves sympathy but is worse from consolation. She manifests a craving for salt. *Natrum muriaticum* suits the person whose emotionally-based eating has been triggered by an off-hand remark.

***Phytolacca decandra* (3)**

Phytolacca decandra is a remedy that is useful for both emaciation due to refusal to eat and for obesity. This remedy is also for people with enlarged parotid and submaxillary salivary glands, as seen in patients with bulimia nervosa.

Many patients with bulimia nervosa develop obesity.

Generals; Obesity, legs thin, but body fat

This rubric contains four remedies - *Ammonium carbonicum* (1) (please see below), *Ammonium muriaticum* (2), *Antimonium crudum* (1) (please see above), and *Plumbum* (1). This rubric suits the 'apple-shaped' type of obesity, which men seem to be afflicted with more than women (who usually fall into the 'pear-shaped' type). People with 'apple-shaped' obesity have most of their excess fat distributed around their abdomens. They are at greater risk for metabolic consequences than those with 'pear-shaped' obesity because the abdominal fat wreaks havoc with insulin. This may lead to insulin resistance, the abnormality that is the root cause of the metabolic syndrome. Insulin resistance seems to underlie the inflammatory response which is implicated in most of our chronic ailments, like arthritis, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes mellitus.

Generals; Obesity, thighs and buttocks

This rubric suits people with the 'pear-shaped' type of obesity. It is more prevalent in women. The rubric contains two remedies - *Lycopodium* and *Natrum muriaticum* (both at level 1) (please see above).

Generals; Obesity, endocrine

This rubric contains three remedies (all at level 1): *Cimicifuga racemosa*, *Hypothalamus*, and *Pituitararia glandula*. *Cimicifuga racemosa* is the homeopathic preparation of the herbal remedy black cohosh, useful in women with menopausal complaints, specifically hot flashes. In this instance, both the homeopathic and the herbal preparations of the plant have similar indications; i.e., for women's reproductive tract ailments.

Generals; Obesity, flabby

The sole remedy (at level 1) for this rubric is *Lac*

vaccinum defloratum, or skimmed cow's milk. The first proving was done 1871 and then again in recent years by Sankaran.

Note: Information on the homeopathic preparations of *Lac vaccinum defloratum*, *Calcarea arsenicosa*, and *Sepia* come from Vermeulen F; *Prisma The Arcana of Materia Medica Illuminated*, Emryss by Publishers, 2002. Materia medica for the other remedies discussed in this article (except where stated otherwise) come from my soon-to-be published book, *Essential Natural Alternatives for Self-Care*.

Lac vaccinum defloratum

Lac vaccinum defloratum has an affinity for nutrition and blood. It is worse for cold, milk, and loss of sleep. This is a remedy for persons who have been adopted and harbor feelings of being separated from one's mother. There may be aversion and/or allergy to cow's milk. There may be depression and "I don't care to live" may be expressed.

Generals; Obesity, during menopause

This rubric contains three remedies - *Calcarea arsenicosa* (1) (please see below), *Graphites* (3) (please see above), and *Sepia* (1).

Sepia

Sepia officinalis is the common cuttlefish, an invertebrate mollusk. *Sepia* was proved by Dr. Hahnemann in 1867. It is a remedy for female reproductive tract organs, especially with bearing down sensations. It is often used in women who manifest indifference to loved ones and a desire to be alone. They have an inability to show love and affection. They have an aversion to sex and do not experience orgasm.

Generals; Obesity, from improper nutrition

This rubric contains two remedies, both at level 1 - *Calcarea carbonica* and *Graphites* (please see above).

Generals; Obesity, in old people

This rubric contains seven remedies: *Ammonium carbonicum* (1) (please see below), *Aurum metallicum* (3), *Baryta carbonica* (1) (please see below), *Fluoricum acidum* (1), *Kali carbonicum* (3) (please see above), *Opium* (1), and *Secale cornutum* (1).

Generals; Obesity, in women

This rubric contains three remedies all at level 1: *Ammonium carbonicum*, *Calcarea arsenicosa*, and *Cerium oxalicum* (please see below).

Generals; Obesity, in young people

Here we find four remedies: *Antimonium crudum*

(2), *Calcarea carbonica* (1) (please see above), *Calcarea acetica* (1), and *Lachesis* (1).

Calcarea acetica

The actions of *Calcarea acetica*, according to Murphy's *Homeopathic Remedy Guide* (in *Encyclopedia Homeopathica*), are similar to *Calcarea carbonica* except that *Calcarea acetica* is useful for inflammations of mucous membranes characterized by membranous exudation.

Lachesis

Lachesis is most useful for women (not only during the menopause) who tend to be loquacious, opinionated, jealous, suspicious, and passionate.

Generals; Obesity, in children

This rubric has twenty remedies: *Antimonium crudum* (2), *Badiaga* (2), *Baryta carbonica* (1), *Belladonna* (1), *Bromium* (1), *Calcarea carbonica* (3), *Cap-sicum* (2), *Cina maritima* (1), *Colocynthis* (2), *Ferrum metallicum* (2), *Graphites* (1), *Guajacum officinale* (1), *Ipecac* (2), *Kali bichromicum* (2), *Kali carbonicum* (1), *Pulsatilla* (1), *Saccharum officinale* (1), *Sarsaparilla officinalis* (1), *Senega* (1), and *Sulphur* (1).

Baryta carbonica

Baryta carbonica is useful for people at both ends of the age spectrum. It may resemble *Calcarea carbonica* except that *Baryta carbonica* is fearful of people and may have a childlike emotional make-up. *Baryta carbonica* people are slow, bashful, lack self-confidence, and they feel ugly. This describes some obese people with binge eating disorder. *Baryta carbonica* is the sole remedy (at level 1) for "Mind; Delusions, mammae are too big or too small." Think of this remedy when your patient has the delusion or fixation that her breasts are the wrong size.

Saccharum officinale

Saccharum officinale, according to Murphy's *Homeopathic Remedy Guide* (in *Encyclopedia Homeopathica*), is useful for emaciation with great appetite. Also for "...fat, bloated, large-limbed children, who are cross, peevish, whining, capricious, want dainty things, tidbits and refuse substantial food."

Senega

The actions of *Polygala senega*, or Snakeroot, according to Murphy's *Homeopathic Remedy Guide* (in *Encyclopedia Homeopathica*), focus on the urinary and respiratory tracts as well as poisonous snake bites.

It is likely that people with obesity also suffer from some of the debilitating physical and emotional ail-

ments that tend to accompany it, such as heart disease, hypertension, arthritis, asthma, diabetes, polycystic ovary syndrome, hypothyroidism, depression, substance abuse, and alcoholism, just to name a few. Since homeopathy is a holistic system of medicine, it is important to remember to consider all aspects of our patient in our analyses.

If you are confronted by an obese patient who suffers from asthma, consider the rubric, "Respiration; Asthmatic, accompanied by obesity." The sole remedy is *Blatta orientalis* (at level 1), the Indian cockroach. Although this remedy has been known to homeopathy as an almost asthma-specific since 1890, it is only recently that conventional medicine has recognized the importance of allergy to cockroach as a trigger for asthma, especially in inner city children.

What do the following rubrics have in common?

Respiration; Difficult, accompanied by obesity

Respiration; Wheezing, accompanied by obesity

Chest; Weakness heart, accompanied by obesity

Generals; Tendency taking a cold in obese

women

Generals; Sedentary habits, in obese women

Generals; Weakness, in obese women

Generals; Weariness, in obese women

All seven have as their sole remedy *Ammonium carbonicum* (at level 1) - smelling salts. *Ammonium carbonicum* is indicated, according to Allen's *Keynotes* (in *Encyclopedia Homeopathica*), for stout, fleshy women who lead a sedentary life, have heart disease, and hemorrhagic tendencies. Like many of our remedies, the opposite is often true as well, and *Ammonium carbonicum* is also indicated for general emaciation with a hemorrhagic tendency. In addition, *Ammonium carbonicum* shows an extreme sensitivity to cold, a constant desire to stretch, a bruised feeling in the muscles, aggravation at 3 am, and generally right-sided symptoms.

Calcarea arsenicosa (1) is the sole remedy in the rubrics, "Female Genitalia/Sex; Menopause, in obese women" and "Chest; Palpitation of heart, menopause, in obese women." *Calcarea arsenicosa*, arsenite of lime, or calcium arsenate, was proved by Dr. Hering in 1848. It is indicated for fleshy women approaching the menopause in whom the slightest emotion or exertion leads to heart palpitations. The main symptoms in MIND include panic attacks from fear of death, the desire for company, and the desire to impress others with their brilliant mind.

Cerium oxalicum, oxalate of the mineral cerium, is the sole remedy (at level 1) for the rubric "Female Genitalia/Sex; Menses, painful, accompanied by obesity." *Cerium oxalicum* is a remedy proven useful for nausea and vomiting in pregnancy and dysmenorrhea in fleshy women.

In my experience, using homeopathic remedies without mastering the elements of healthy eating and healthy exercise will likely be unsuccessful in treating obesity. Here, a combined approach is essential. For my patients who request treatment for obesity, I prescribe a nutritional program, daily physical exercise, homeopathic remedies (often in combination), herbal medicines, and nutritional supplements.

About the Author: Ellen Feingold, MD, MPH is a pediatrician with a previous specialty focus in pediatric and adolescent gynecology and childhood eating disorders. She currently is the Director of the Homeopathy Center of Delaware (Wilmington) specializing in homeopathic, herbal and nutritional treatment of persons of all ages. She is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at Thomas Jefferson College of Medicine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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