

Carbo Vegetabilis - Vegetable Charcoal

by Matthew Wood

Charcoal is produced under conditions of depleted oxygen and abundant carbon dioxide. Wood is burnt in the absence of sufficient oxygen, leaving a concentrated, combustible material. Charcoal burns more cleanly than wood. As a readily available substance, charcoal entered into folk-medicine and even into conventional practice. It is an old domestic remedy for bruises. The black powder, applied to the part, reduces the bruises. Charcoal absorbs gases, hence it is used in fish aquarium filters and internally to absorb gases in the stomach. It is still available in drugstores for this purpose.

These uses, however, represent only the most crude applications of the remedy. We can build upon the original indications by reference to the homoeopathic provings and then to certain ideas which unite our traditional applications and homoeopathic experiences into a meaningful whole.

Congeaed blood

In Chinese medicine there is a syndrome called 'congealed blood'. *Carbo Veg* is the archetypal remedy for this syndrome. The characteristic symptoms are a bluish complexion and tongue, choppy pulse (irregular in power and beat, but not intermittent), and sharp, shooting, non-mobile pains emanating from what is taken to be a lump of 'stagnant blood'. This provided the perfect over-view and unites a disparate array of symptoms given in the homoeopathic literature. *Carbo Veg* is the remedy par excellence for 'congealed blood'. I would, however, like to expand upon the traditional symptoms somewhat.

'Blood stasis' is a condition which usually affects the entire organism and produces characteristic symptoms which, I believe, go beyond the rather narrow indications of traditional Chinese medicine. The overall condition is due to poor oxygenation and excessive carbonization of the blood. This can result from adhesions of blood following injuries, poor cardiovascular tone causing stagnation of blood, or anaerobic bacteria causing stomach gas and excess carbonization of the blood. If the adhesions of blood are towards the surface (visible as blue-yellow, stagnant appearing marks), there will not be sharp, fixed pain. If the adhesions are deep, this pain will put pressure on the nerves and cause these characteristic pains.

The homoeopathic description of *Carbo Veg* matches this syndrome in its constitutional manifestations. The remedy possesses the general blood stasis, the blue complexion and tongue. Homoeopaths have not generally used *Carbo Veg* for the local manifestations of congealed blood (ie bruises and contusions) but in case after case, where the symptoms of congealed blood are not complicated by secondary factors, homoeopathic *Carbo Veg* has cleared up these bruises.

If I had to choose one remedy that illustrated the virtues of combining the Chinese diagnosis and the homoeopathic remedy it would be *Carbo Veg*. Before I learned traditional Chinese medicine, I hardly ever used *Carbo Veg*: now I use it all the time.

Carbo Veg versus Arnica

Most homoeopaths would think of *Arnica* as the archetypal remedy for congealed blood, since it is the standard remedy for bruises and contusions. *Carbo Veg* would not come so readily to mind, because it has not been used for this in homoeopathy. However, *Arnica* is suited to conditions where symptoms of blood stasis and inflammation are combined, while *Carbo Veg* is suited to conditions where there is only stagnation, not inflammation.

Quick reflection on these states will reveal that *Arnica* is to be used when a bruise is new and there is still an inflammatory process at work, trying to break down the deposits. *Carbo Veg* will work when the inflammatory process has died down and blood remains behind. Such adhesions can be more or less permanent, unless the right remedy is found, or they are broken up by manual manipulation or cupping.

The indications must be properly individualized. *Carbo Veg* is called for in patients where the blood forms into an adhesion which resists reabsorption, even months or years after the initial formation. If the adhesion is in the interior, there are no outward signs of its presence, except through the pain, pulse, tongue and complexion. If the adhesion is large and strategically placed it causes pain by pressing on the nerves, but it may also be relatively painless. But if the adhesion is visible, it will have a characteristic

look that distinguishes the remedy from *Arnica*. *Arnica* has both blood stasis and inflammation therefore the bruise is bluish-reddish. *Carbo Veg*, however, has blood stasis alone, therefore the bruise tends to be bluish-yellow. The same is true for the complexion.

Characteristic symptoms

The characteristic symptoms calling for *Carbo Veg* are the cyanotic complexion, darkish or bluish tongue and the choppy pulse. In case after case, this has been enough to set me on the correct path. Yet, the blue tone in complexion is sometimes not entirely obvious; in some patients there is but a stagnant yellow or brown, commingled with a little blue. This discolouration is pronounced around the mouth, nose, eyes and wrists - anywhere where the vasculature is close to the surface.

The *Carbo Veg* patient tends to be rather bulky, heavy build, though this is not always the case. The oxidation in such patients is evidently poor, predisposing to congealed blood. The tongue is often blue or dark in tone. The pulse is the most reliable indication. The beats are irregular in frequency and direction. They hit the artery in a different place each time, and at a different rate but do not actually intermit. It feels as if the pulse was wobbling on its axis, or like the patient had been hit by a big stick and knocked off its fulcrum. This is called the choppy pulse in Chinese medicine.

The local areas most likely to be affected in the *Carbo Veg* patient are the lungs, heart and stomach. Because of poor oxygenation the lungs are not able to operate at full capacity. As a result the chest may feel heavy, breathing restricted and there may be an accumulation of mucus. *Carbo Veg* is often indicated in patients where recovery from bronchial infection is hindered by stasis in the lungs. Perhaps the poor oxygenation carbonizes the blood, or the patient had congealed blood tendencies to begin with.

Because the circulation has to push against the pressure caused by coagulation of blood, the heart is also affected. This remedy is called for in prostration with blue face and extremities, a cold, clammy sweat, with or without heart pain, but indicating cardiac collapse.

Carbo Veg is also an important remedy for gas and bloating in the stomach. This is often associated with anaerobic infection - the organism seeks to keep oxygenation at a low

level and thrives in patients with carbonization of the blood. Thus, *Carbo Veg* is often used in homoeopathy for stomach gas. In standard pharmacy, charcoal is still sold for internal congestion; the material substance absorbs gas.

The mental symptoms of *Carbo Veg* have not been brought out in homoeopathic literature. Boericke speaks of melancholy and fear of the dark, ghosts etc. This does not really hit the core of the mentality in my experience. I would rather say that the *Carbo Veg* patient suffers from a lack of joy. There are neither ups nor downs. The patient does not feel deeply depressed, but joyless, emotionally limpid.

Case examples

Here are a few case histories from my files illustrating the range of problems suited to *Carbo Veg*, including the characteristic mental symptoms.

1. A thirty-eight year old man fell suddenly and very hard, hitting his left arm and side on the pavement. He was bruised throughout these areas. After a week the bruises had subsided but he still felt like he had not recovered. 'I feel like a wet dishrag' he said. 'Limp and dragged down'. His pulse was choppy and his skin clammy. I gave him *Carbo Veg* 6x and improvement was rapid. He said that every time he took the remedy he felt an outburst of joy. This caused him to realize that before, he had felt a flatness, a lack of joy.

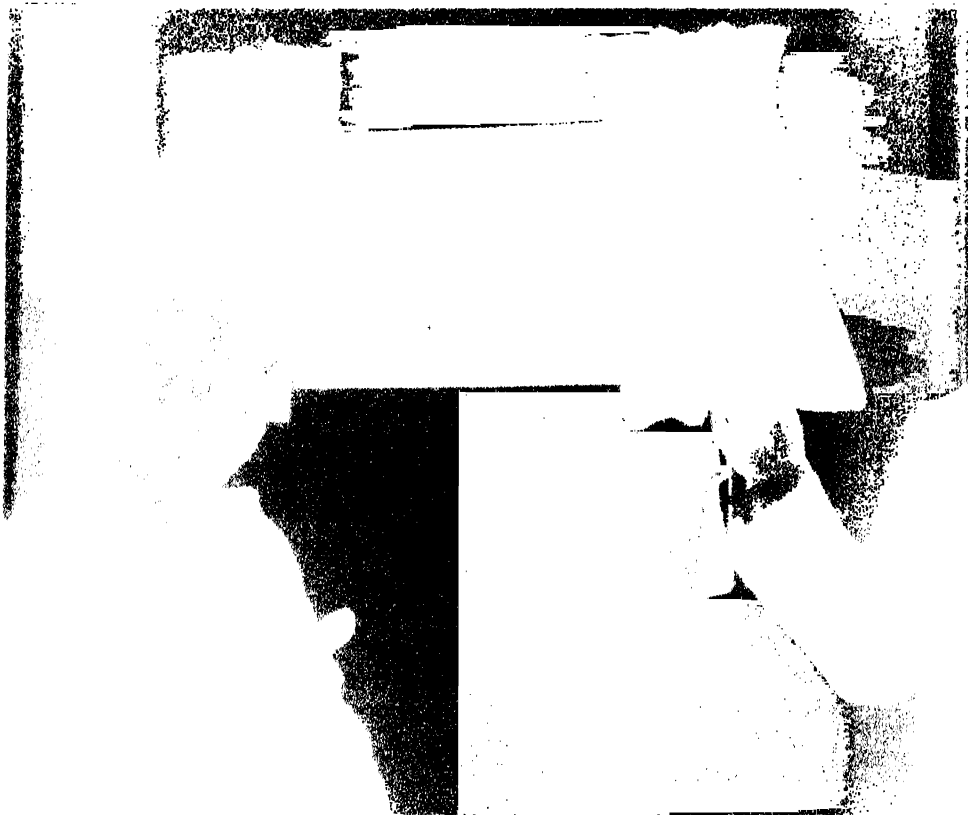
2. A woman of stout build, aged 39, requested a Bach flower remedy for 'lack of joy'. Her pulse was choppy and the colour around her mouth was just a little drab and blue, so I asked if she had been in an accident. Yes, she replied. Eight months ago she fell on the ice, a week later she started to feel excruciating pain. She developed sciatica and was under the care of a neurologist, taking heavy doses of pain killers every day. X-rays showed no damage to the nerves but the symptoms were getting so bad that she was afraid she would soon lose the ability to walk. *Carbo Veg* 30x completely relieved the physical and mental symptoms within a month. 'You saved my back' she said.

3. A six year old was sledding down a hill, when he hit his face on the back of a concrete park bench. Six weeks later he still had a bluish-yellow complexion. In the past two weeks he had started to spontaneously bleed from the nose. (Evidently the platelets were falling out of circulation and were unable to congeal the

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Minister for Health Opens New Out-Patients Department

Enid Segall goes to view the refurbishment of the new outpatients' department at the RLHH



The Minister pulled the cord and the curtains parted much to everyone's relief as they had got stuck at the rehearsal the day before.

Photo: Enid Segall

Sometime ago we published an article on the history of the Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital with a picture of the basement Out-patients Department in the early 1900s. In response we had a letter from a member who recalled being taken there as a child when the fashions were similar and she felt that only the clothes had changed since then.

Not any more! The basement Out-patients Department has been re-furbished and on February 8th, the Minister for Health, Mr Gerald Malone, MP, opened a new Out-patients Department on the ground floor by unveiling a plaque to commemorate his visit. Watched by The Rt. Hon.

Dr J. Dickson Mabon, Chairman of the NHS Trust, who had been an MP not so long ago, Mr Malone asked how long his speech should be and jokingly queried whether it should be as long as some that Dr Mabon had made when he was in the House. Amid the ensuing laughter he pulled the cord and made no speech at all.

Helpful

The Minister was generous with his time. A number of people had been invited to meet him, including BHA Chairman, Mr Martyn Long CBE., DL., Dr David Reilly and Dr Russell Malcolm from the Glasgow Homoeopathic Hospital.

The Royal London's consultants and staff were naturally all present and members of the Hospital Board were there in strength. Mr Malone stayed to listen to everyone concerned with the various homoeopathic hospitals, research and education. Aspects of forthcoming legislation were discussed and he seemed keen to listen and learn.

We must hope that Mr Malone will remain the Minister for some time to come. His predecessor, Dr Brian Mawhinney visited the hospital in June 94 and a week later was part of the Government reshuffle and he found himself Minister of Transport. **BHA**



**Left: the new Ground Floor
Out Patients Department.**

Photo:Enid Segall

Ready, Steady, Go!
The Minister for Health,
Mr Gerald Malone MP,
prepares to unveil the plaque
watched by the
Rt. Hon. Dr Dickson Mabon
and Anne Eden,
Chief Executive
of the Hospital Trust.

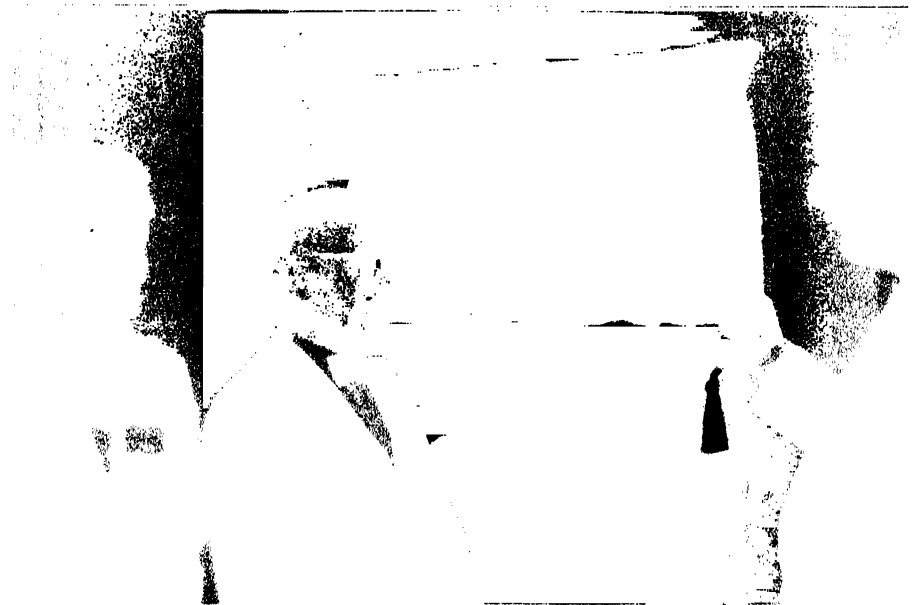


Photo:Enid Segall



**Elizabeth Wincott, Secretary of
the Faculty of Homoeopathy
with Dr David Reilly
of Glasgow. Dr Peter Fisher
in the Background**

Photo:Enid Segall

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 blood when necessary). *Carbo Veg 30x* cleared up the symptoms in a few days.
 If we find a symptom like 'lack of joy' in one patient we will probably find the opposite in another. Indeed, excess joy was a pathogenetic symptom produced in the first patient mentioned above. Thus, we sometimes find *Carbo Veg* necessary in people suffering from 'excess joy'. Such a condition is occasionally found in children of sanguine make-up. Here is a case history.

The patient was a little boy, aged 6, who had been walking on his toes for most of three years. The mother had taken him to many doctors and he was now under the care of a physical therapist. No one was sure whether the problem was physical, psychological, or just a bad habit which he had developed. He was remarkably healthy, so the only objective symptoms I could find were a choppy pulse and a slightly cyanotic complexion. I joked with the mother that he seemed to be suffering from excess joy and maybe this was lifting him off the ground. *Carbo Veg 6x* cured the condition within 48 hours.

Carbo Veg is often required when there is a stasis of the lungs. When the infection has long subsided but the lungs are still encumbered and the system is stagnant, *Carbo Veg* is sometimes required. Here the indications are the choppy pulse, cyanotic to yellowish discolouration around the eyes and mouth and prolonged coughing which ends in gagging and vomiting of mucus.

A typical case history is: A woman brought in her 6 year old daughter, suffering from bronchial congestion, wheezing and coughing which lasted for over a year. She had been to several conventional and homoeopathic physicians. I noticed the stagnant blue-yellow complexion around the eyes and mouth and the choppy pulse. *Carbo Veg 30x* improved the child almost immediately. However, a tendency for relapse remained for six months, during which higher potencies were needed. Though much improved, she continued to have a tendency to slight bronchial congestion.

Carbo Veg is indicated in patients who have 'breathed fire'. A case history is given by Temple Hoyne in 'Clinical Materia Medica'. And I have an experience in my own practice. A sixty two year old man who worked as a janitor had inhaled some noxious chemicals which burned his lungs. He was hospitalized

but sent home the next day, having received no medication. The following afternoon he came to me. The pulse was choppy - it felt as if he had been hit with a big stick. There were no other indications except the burning sensation in the lungs. *Carbo Veg 30x* cured the symptoms within 48 hours.

Margaret Tyler, in 'Homoeopathic Drug Pictures', called this remedy 'a veritable corpse reviver' because it will raise the patient from such prostration and stagnation, especially in cardiac collapse. This phrase was also the cause of an odd event at the herb store where I worked. It was a day before the 'Harmonic Convergence' in 1987, and requests had been getting pretty unusual. A woman came in and asked for the remedy 'raising the dead'. The people at the counter were perplexed. She caused more confusion when she continued, 'Well Dr so-and-so in St Paul uses it all the time'. She mentioned the name of a prominent naturopath who was a good homoeopath. The customer never got her remedy. I came in a few hours later and recognized the description of *Carbo Veg*. That night I sprinkled a few tablets in a graveyard. *BHA*

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