

## Chapter 3

### *First Aid*

Homeopathy is often thought of as a gentle, slow-acting therapy, but in the treatment of emergencies, whether arising from accident, sudden illness or emotional trauma, it has a great deal to offer, much of which is unknown and unavailable to other disciplines.

#### **GENERAL APPLICATIONS**

##### *Aconite*

*Aconite* has been my best standby in acute medical emergencies. It is indicated in all cases of mental or physical shock or fright, with any of the following symptoms: tremor, palpitations, hyperventilation or gasping for breath; tight feeling in the chest; feeling cold or hot, collapse, or obvious fright or distress. Also eye injuries.

I met the aconite plant for the first time in 1975. I had seen many coloured pictures of it, and realised that to the uninitiated it looked like a purple snapdragon, although it is actually a delphinium. I knew too what the root should look like, as on numerous occasions it had caused fatalities when it had been wrongly identified as a horseradish. (A distinguishing feature is that the aconite root, when sectioned, turns red.) I had stopped by the roadside for a picnic on the way to 'La Grande Dixence' - the highest dam in Europe - and exploring a little stream that descended down the steep mountainside was suddenly aware of a strong smell of mint. Nearby was a patch of wild mint in which stood clumps of aconite in full bloom. I thought it unusual to find it here - it is an alpine plant, said to thrive on well-manured ground, normally found near to chalets, but there were neither cattle nor chalets in that remote part of Switzerland.

Aconite can boast an ancient and fascinating history, and has deservedly been called 'the Queen Mother of poisons' - it was also known as 'wolf's bane', and even as 'women's bane'! It was certainly an effective arrow poison. Plutarch relates that Orodes was cured of his

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dropsy by the juice of the plant: 'The dropsie received the poison, and the one drave the other out of Orodes' body and set him on foot again.' So the principle of homeopathy - 'let like be cured by like' or 'what a drug can cause it can cure' - was known to the Greeks. Hahnemann acknowledged that the ancients knew of this principle, and gives many examples in his *Organon*.

On a more macabre note, many years ago I came across the following cutting. I would like to pay tribute to the author who did this research, but the article was written anonymously:

Giving evidence on the detection of poisons in the body after death, Sir Robert *Christison* (1797-1882), *professor of medical jurisprudence* at Edinburgh University, stated that there was only one deadly agent which could not satisfactorily be traced, and that was ... when the judge interrupted him: 'Stop, please, Dr Christison. It is much better that the public should not know it.' It is interesting to know that the notorious Dr George Henry Lamson, who apparently was the first (1881) to employ aconitine with criminal intent, had attended Christison's lectures on toxicology as a medical student at Edinburgh. He thus knew that there was no chemical test for this substance and that it was unlikely to be recognised in post mortem. As it happened, a few words uttered by the dying victim referring to his 'throat closing', and his 'skin being drawn up', afforded a clue to Sir Thomas Stevenson, who identified the poison administered as being aconitine.

As a medical student my knowledge of *Aconite* was limited to its use as a liniment: 'Lin ABC' was very popular in those days. The three initials stood for *Aconite*, *Belladonna* and *Capsicum*. It is hardly ever used now. From a homeopathic point of view, a more useful triad of medicines is *Aconite*, *Belladonna* and *Calc. carb.* Potentised, these are frequently indicated in just that order in feverish conditions. For first aid home use you cannot go wrong by treating fever at its onset with *Aconite*. If after a few doses given frequently the condition deteriorates, follow on with *Belladonna* unless there are positive indications for an alternative homeopathic medicine, such as *Ferrum phos.* When the fever is all over, a dose of *Calc. carb.* may well be indicated, especially in the case of children, because this is the constitutional medicine for the clumsy, chubby, chilly, sweaty, constipated child - the very one to go down quickly with a high temperature when the wind is in the north-east. This is the weather that most calls for *Aconite* and *Belladonna*. (There are other 'East Wind Remedies', such as *Bryonia*, *Hepar sulph.*, *Nux vomica* and *Spongia*, and any one of these may be required if the *Aconite* does not nip the illness in the bud.)

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A father phoned at 11 a.m. about his five-year-old son who had vomited and had a temperature of 39.5°C (103°F). He was given *Aconite* 3x followed by *Belladonna* 6c. By 1.30p.m. his temperature had dropped to 37.8°C (100°F), and by the evening he seemed completely well. Previously these attacks had been treated with antibiotics, and despite this the temperature would swing up and down for two days. A year later his mother, who was a senior administrator in the county's Children's Department, reported that for the first time he had not required any antibiotics for a year. 'The pills are marvellous.'

One way to remember the indications for *Aconite* is to take the words 'acute' and 'night', and join them to form a neologism, ACU-NIGHT. To be more accurate, transform this to ACU-FRIGHT, because these are the two states that cry out for the soothing influence of *Aconite*.

One morning I visited a local nursing home to see 92-year-old Mrs S., a new resident. The Matron told me that Mrs S. had arrived four days ago, but that she had not needed to send for me because she had been able to cope with her adequately. Apparently ten years previously Mrs S. had had a coronary. For the last year she had regularly been having nocturnal attacks of palpitation, which terrified her. She would call out for help, expecting another coronary, which could kill her. Unless someone came at once, and stayed two hours, she became increasingly breathless. In her restless state she would toss about, clutching her heart, begging for the window to be opened wider and pleading for help to get her head out of it for more air.

It was because of this distressing condition that her devoted family had reluctantly agreed to her admission, since they could endure their mother's plight and disturbed nights no longer. Predictably, the first night she had a typical attack. The night nurse was so concerned about her that she woke Matron. When Matron saw Mrs S., and I quote, 'I got that set of bottles with those sugar pills that you left for emergencies (Home Remedies), and found *Aconite*, which said 'for any emergency', and gave her one. It was marvellous; she settled down ever so quickly. I'm sure she simply panics and makes it worse for herself. I often use *Aconite* for different emergencies at night.'

Matron and I were discussing one of the other patients when a new care assistant came rushing in, white and trembling. (She herself was on my panel list, and I had known her from childhood.) 'Oh,' she burst out, 'I am sure Mrs H. has just died. I went in to see if she was all right, and when she didn't answer or move I touched her, and her head fell forward!' It was her first experience of death, and she was visibly

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shaking. I gave her an *Aconite* pill from my pocket case. Acute-Fright - very much so.

What then are the uses of *Aconite*? The label on the bottle supplied in the Home Remedy Kit reads:

#### ACONITE: SHOCK and No. 1 FEVER

For shock, croup, effects of fright or chills; any emergencies, e.g. accident, animal bites, asthma, haemorrhage, bereavement, distress, breathlessness, palpitations, tremblings, or numb tinglings. At onset of fevers, if thirsty, restless, anxious.

10 granules (one tablet or pill) every hour until relief

The Home Remedy Kit is issued as tablets (or granules in a few cases), normally in the 30c potency, unless a request is made for a different potency. I only carry and use a 10M potency of *Aconite* for cases where the mental changes are most pronounced, i.e. panic, shock, fright, etc.

An 18-year-old girl came with her mother to surgery. She complained of attacks of tingling in her arms and fingers. At the same time she felt dizzy and faint and was very conscious of her heart beating rapidly and forcefully. The mother volunteered: 'I used to get turns like that when I was her age.' I suspected that the girl was hyperventilating, although both she and her mother denied that this was so. In this state a person, usually when emotionally disturbed, takes rapid, shallow, panting breaths, with the result that they blow out their carbon dioxide and develop hypocapnia (it is a little more complicated than that) until ultimately they can actually go unconscious. Before this stage is reached they develop a plethora of different disconnected symptoms involving any system of the body.

The symptoms this girl had experienced were typical. Whatever the cause, I was safe in giving her *Aconite* for these attacks. It proved most effective. If the attacks persisted it would be necessary to enquire further into the cause of them and give a longer-acting medicine to prevent them.

Croup is another condition mentioned on the instruction label.

I received a phone call at 1 a.m. concerning a 3-year-old boy who could not get his breath and was very distressed, gasping and suffocating, with a loud, barking, croupy cough. The only medicine in the house was *Aconite*; I told them to give him a dose every fifteen minutes and put on a steam kettle, and to ring me after half an hour if he was no better.

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The phone call came at morning surgery. After three doses he had gone to sleep, but had woken at 3a.m. with another, less severe attack. *Aconite* was repeated, and in half an hour he was asleep again. Next morning he was as bright as a button.

If asked, 'In what type of illness or emergency do you use *Aconite*?', I might turn the question to 'When do I not use *Aconite*?' because I routinely use it on arrival at the scene of road accidents, coronary thrombosis, sudden death, burns, scalds, funerals - any and every occasion where panic, fright or shock are in evidence.

### *Arnica*

If I were allowed to use only three homeopathic medicines, my choice would be *Arnica*, *Aconite* and *Belladonna*. *Arnica* is the medicine of first choice for bruises, sprains, contusions, head injuries, concussion headaches and myocardial infarction. It prevents and relieves muscle

fatigue from overexertion.

### *Dosage*

Use in any potency which is available: 6c, 30c, 200c or 10M, repeating every fifteen minutes in acute conditions, and otherwise every two to four hours. Locally it can be applied in a cream, **or** as a compress, provided that the skin is unbroken. For this purpose a solution is made from 2 to 3ml of mother tincture (designated 0) in a cupful of cold water. *Arnica* in high potency is so effective when taken internally that local treatment is rarely necessary.

I was taking my daughter and her friend Sue (the daughter of a retired senior surgeon), home from a lacrosse match. On getting into my car my daughter slammed the front door, crushing Sue's left index finger. She cried out with pain, and I immediately gave her one pill of *Arnica* 10M from my pocket case. Ten minutes later I gave her a second dose. She said, 'The pain has already stopped, that pill is marvellous.' By now there was a slight subungual haematoma forming. I gave her six further doses to take at half-hourly intervals, and told her to tell her father it was homeopathic *Arnica*. I dropped her at the entrance of the drive leading to her house a quarter of an hour later, and she said her finger was not hurting.

Feeling some guilt, and still being concerned about her, I phoned her father that evening, and before I could apologise he said, 'Whatever is in those pills? My daughter is most impressed, and is emphatic that her finger does not hurt. I have looked up the word *Arnica* in all my books,

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and cannot find anything about it, but Sue insists I buy a bottle of these pills. Where can I get them?' I told him a little about homeopathy, and he kept repeating, 'She is most impressed, and so am I.'

I issued *Arnica* in the 30th potency to each family I treated, with the instructions:

#### ARNICA: INJURY

For bruises, sprains, concussion, crushed fingers, road accidents, etc. If shocked, give *Aconite* first. Also for exhaustion or muscle aching (heart, chest, back or limbs) from strain, sport or overuse. Use before or after dental surgery.

10 granules (one tablet or pill) every two hours until relief

If there were room on the label, it could usefully include: 'As first-aid for coronary thrombosis'.

In one surgery session I prescribed *Arnica* six times, **to:**

- 1) A sixteen-year-old girl with a bruised chin following a fall from her horse.
- 2) A housewife who had sprained her thumb when trying to open a sardine tin.
- 3) A man who had a concrete slab fall onto his shins.
- 4) A foundry worker complaining of an aching back and legs, after his first week of work in his new job.
- 5) A schoolboy with a sprained forefoot.
- 6) A keen soccer player who had stubbed his toes against the goal post - and hadn't even scored a goal as a compensation!

I had been using this most useful remedy on an average of once a day for about twenty years before I ever saw an arnica plant, or even a good coloured illustration of one. (It is not in Culpeper's *Herbal*.) I was at Martigny, in Switzerland, on my way to the Furka Pass, when I saw an illustrated packet of arnica seeds in a shop window. Some hours later I stopped near the top of the pass to enjoy the scenery. By now I was over 1500m (5000ft) high but still there was an abundance of conifers, larches and stone pines growing on the mountain side. I could see snow-capped mountain peaks standing up against the clear blue sky away in the distance. It was here that I discovered my first arnica flowers. They stood up nearly ten feet tall, with large orange-yellow flower heads. I would have liked to pick one, but contented myself with photographing them instead. On the way down the pass I found some

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more plants growing near the roadside on the sparsely-covered rocks. They were in a very exposed, windswept position.

Later I found a chemist in Lausanne who sold packets of arnica leaves, with a vivid-coloured picture of the flower on the label. On the reverse side there were instructions in German and French for making both a compress and a medicine for internal use to treat bruises and dislocations. I have heard Dr Blackie say that the Swiss guides take arnica at the beginning of each season to prevent muscle soreness after their first climb.

*Aconite* and *Arnica* between them probably are indicated in 80% of all accidents and emergencies, and many doctors have been converted to homeopathy following their initial experiments and successes with these two remedies. Often they are all that is needed, and the patient's own homeostatic response will complete the healing; in other cases different remedies may be required to complete the cure.

#### ***Calendula (Marigold)***

For cuts, lacerations, abrasions, gravel rash, burns, sore fissures and bed sores. Used as a mouthwash it is an excellent haemostatic after dental extraction. Also valuable externally after episiotomy.

#### *Dosage*

Use internally in potency 12c to 200c, or apply locally in aqueous solution (5 ml to 500ml or 10 drops of tincture to half a pint of water), oil, cream or ointment.

#### ***Carbo vegetabilis (Vegetable Charcoal)***

For collapse or faint. A valuable remedy in vasovagal attacks **or in** more severe collapse, post-operatively or in cardiac cases, where the patient is cold, bluish, sweaty, with cold extremities, thin thready pulse, and a desire for air at a window, or to be fanned.

#### *Dosage*

30c to 10M potency given frequently, either in granules dry on the tongue or in water, every five to ten minutes until response, and then at longer intervals.