

Back in Action

Beat low back pain with homeopathic healing



By JAMIE A. OSKIN, ND

“As I lifted my son into his car seat, I felt a strange ‘pop’ in my back. Now I can’t even get out of bed!”

“I just bent over to tie my shoes, and suddenly my back went out!”

“With this terrible shooting pain down the back of my leg, I can barely walk, let alone go to work!”



We've all heard stories like these. In fact, we've probably lived them! An estimated 80% of adults experience acute low back pain at some point in their lives, and almost 20% have had an episode in the last month. It's one of the most common reasons adults visit a doctor, and Americans spend a whopping \$86 billion a year treating their backaches!

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) defines acute low back pain as pain in the back, below the ribs and above the thighs, that lasts less than six weeks (other sources extend that definition to three months). Although an

These cases are from patients treated at the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine's clinic in Scottsdale, Arizona, where I work collaboratively with Drs. Stephen Messer, Eric Udell, and Natalie Ham, as well as students in a team-teaching setting. I thank them for their input, guidance, and permission to use the cases presented in this article. All names of patients have been changed.

acute backache can really cramp your style, in most cases, there is no serious underlying medical condition* and the pain eventually resolves. For this reason, the AAFP recommends conservative treatment for at least four to six weeks (e.g., with reassurance, advice to stay active, and pain relievers).

Tests? Surgery?

Most people do not need immediate x-rays, CT scans, or MRIs. In fact, such imaging tests are controversial because of the poor correlation between their findings and back pain symptoms. For example, if you gave MRIs to 100 people, a large percentage would show herniated disks (bulging of the spongy pads between spinal vertebra), yet they would report no

pain relievers and definitely before risky spinal surgery! I can't think of a safer, more gentle, affordable, or effective option than homeopathy for low back pain.

Here are the stories of four people with back trouble—Lisa, Jim, Vanessa, and Kim. Each received different treatment, tailored to their individual story of suffering, and each got significant relief with homeopathy.

Lisa's gymnastics injury

Lisa, a pleasant teenager with long dusty blonde hair, sat slouched in my office one Friday afternoon looking very uncomfortable. She frequently changed positions in her chair and grimaced with each shift. "I

Americans spend a whopping \$86 billion a year treating their backaches!

back pain. Other people with severe back pain would have normal-looking MRIs. Imaging tests can even lead to unnecessary surgeries. One radiology study, for example, found that among people who got MRIs for back pain, twice as many underwent surgery as those who didn't get MRIs. Other research shows that back surgery is not typically very effective and carries high risks of complications. In fact, some experts estimate that 95% of back surgeries are unnecessary!

Your first resort

Fortunately, we have alternatives! Homeopathy is a very effective treatment for uncomplicated low back pain. Try it as your first resort—before conventional

hurt my back in gymnastics practice on Monday afternoon," she told me, "and now I'm in a *lot* of pain!" She had missed school all week because she could hardly get out of bed; Lisa rated her pain as "8" on a scale of 1 to 10. She had never had anything like this before and was an otherwise healthy 16-year-old.

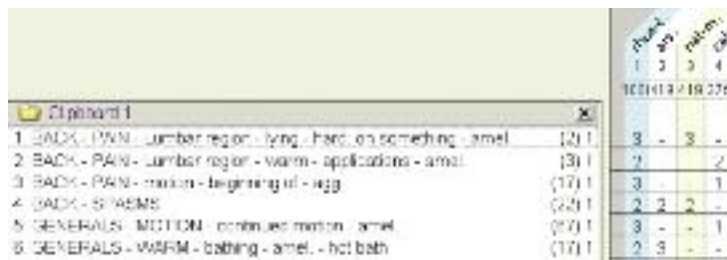
Lisa had visited a chiropractor for spinal manipulation earlier in the week but experienced only mild improvement. She had not taken any conventional pain relievers because she and her family wanted to try alternatives first. However, after almost a week of relentless pain, Lisa and her parents were getting desperate. They worried that she was missing too much school and wouldn't be able to catch up. Lisa was afraid

of needles, so acupuncture was out. They decided to try homeopathy as a last resort.

Sleeping on the floor

Lisa described intense cramping in her low back that came and went in quick spasms. Every time she changed positions, as from sitting to standing, the pain got worse. I asked when the pain was at its absolute worst, and she said it was excruciating when she first changed positions ... but if she continued to walk after getting through the initial pain of standing up, she got a little relief. Since the injury, she preferred to lie on her back on the hard floor rather than on her soft bed, and she even slept there at night. Lisa couldn't think of much else that improved her pain. After a little prodding, however, she remembered that an extremely hot shower helped. "But it has to be super hot—almost hot enough to burn me," she said.

Aha! That last symptom was the clincher! It helped me put together the totality of characteristic (i.e., unique and individualizing) symptoms that led to the remedy for her pain. Below is my repertorization of Lisa's case, using RADAR 10.0 homeopathic software. Since Lisa's problem was a new, acute complaint caused by traumatic injury, I focused on the symptoms of her current back pain rather than her past health history.



The repertorization pointed clearly to *Rhus tox*, and my knowledge of materia medica confirmed this choice. So I asked Lisa to take a dose of *Rhus tox* 200c every two hours until she noticed clear improvement; at that point, she could dose less frequently and stop altogether if she was completely better. I chose this relatively high potency with frequent repetition because Lisa's case was acute and the pain was intense. In very acute cases like this, I hope to see a positive reaction within the first few hours of taking the remedy—and definitely by the next day. If I don't see



Lisa was back on the balance beam, happily winning ribbons and trophies with her team.

improvement within 24 hours, I'm apt to think I chose the wrong remedy, and I will search for a different one.

Back on the beam

On Saturday when I called to check on Lisa, her mom answered and the relief was evident in her voice: "Lisa is dramatically better—about 80% improved since yesterday! And with each dose, she seems to feel a little better still..." By Monday, Lisa's mom called to say her daughter was 95% better with only the smallest hint of pain. Lisa wasn't even complaining anymore, so she went back to school. Lisa's mom thanked me profusely, noting that nothing else they'd tried had helped. She wisely decided to keep her daughter out of gymnastics for another week or two, just to be on the safe side. But very soon, Lisa was back on the balance beam, happily winning ribbons and trophies with her team.

Jim steals second base

Jim was an active, outgoing, and athletic 11-year-old. Tall and thin with curly red hair, freckles, and braces, he played catcher on his Little League team. One week before coming to our clinic, Jim made a valiant attempt to steal second base to put his team ahead in a close game. They eventually scored another run and won the game, but Jim's heroic effort came at a price; a back injury. He was extremely sore the day after the game, and the pain did not get better over the course of a week. Jim couldn't go to school, and even worse, baseball practice was impossible.

After examining Jim, we decided he had a low back strain, so we went to work to find a remedy to help him. Because Jim had been healthy up until this injury, we focused our attention entirely on his acute back symptoms.

Not many clues...

Like many children and adolescents, Jim found it difficult to describe his symptoms with the kind of detail that most adults use. He simply pointed to his lower back and said, "It hurts!" When Dr. Ham asked about the sensation, he just shrugged. After more coaxing, we learned that Jim's back pain was much worse when he changed positions or began to move. However, the pain would get a little better when he continued to move and walk it off.

So far, his symptoms sounded like a routine *Rhus tox* case, and very much like Lisa's. (Tip: When a possible remedy comes to mind while questioning a person, write it down in the margin so you'll remember. Then free your mind so you can stay unbiased while you finish taking all their symptoms.) But as we investigated further, we found that Jim's back pain was *not* better from hot packs or a warm shower, as would be expected of a *Rhus tox* complaint. In fact, it was just the opposite. The only other thing that made Jim's pain better was an ice-pack. That was all the information we could get from Jim about his back problem. His case seemed difficult to solve at first because of the paucity of symptoms; so we had to think a little harder to determine what was characteristic about Jim's symptoms.

Rhus tox complaints are strongly better from warmth and worse from cold, so *Rhus tox* didn't match Jim's symptoms. We had to find a remedy that shared *Rhus tox*'s characteristic movement symptoms ("worse on first motion, better with continued motion"), but that included "better from cold applications" in its indications. A quick repertory search led to *Pulsatilla*: pains that are worse from first motion and better with continued motion—yet worse from warm applications and better from cold. See our repertorization chart below.

Pulsatilla because they have similar indications. So when a person says they feel worse from initial motion and better from continued motion, don't automatically presume they need *Rhus tox*!

Their stories also illustrate that in acute, uncomplicated back pain, the specific details of the back symptoms are typically essential to finding the remedy. Other important factors are any changes the person has experienced *since the acute condition began*, including their general temperature (e.g., whether they feel better

	Path.	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
1 BACK - PAIN - motion - beginning of - agg.	(17)	3	0	2	1	1
2 GENERALS - MOTION - continued motion - amel.	(67)	3	2	1	2	1
3 GENERALS - COLD - applications - amel.	(24)	1	1	1	1	1

from cold or warmth), thirst, appetite, sleep, perspiration, or mental/emotional state. If no change occurred, such symptoms are not important for finding a remedy for

We asked Jim to take *Pulsatilla* 200c three times a day until definite improvement; at that point, he could dose less frequently and stop when he was completely better. We chose a high potency in frequent repetition because Jim's condition was acute with marked pain.

the acute problem. For example, Jim was outgoing before and after his injury, so his gregarious nature did not enter into our analysis. And even though Jim did not have the classic mental-emotional symptoms of *Pulsatilla* (mild, gentle, yielding, weepy, changeable), Hahne-

Jim made a valiant attempt to steal second base to put his team ahead, but his heroic effort came at a price ...



When a week had passed and Dr. Ham hadn't heard from Jim's family, she called to check in. "Oh, he's had a miraculous recovery!" Jim's mother said. "Within a day or two of starting to take that remedy, Jim's pain was completely gone. So I didn't really see the need to call you back." As for Jim, he was just happy to be back behind home plate playing catcher.

Lisa & Jim: similar & different

The stories of Lisa and Jim illustrate an important point: when treating acute low back pain, it's easy to confuse *Rhus tox* and

mann's method of prescribing on the totality of the characteristic symptoms led us to *Pulsatilla*. So don't worry if the stereotypical symptoms of a remedy are missing—as long as the rest of the characteristic symptoms add up!

Compared to Lisa's and Jim's relatively straightforward acute back pain, the following two stories are about people with more complex or chronic back pain. Cases like these are best treated by professionals.

Vanessa takes opiates for pain

Vanessa, a dedicated and loving 43-year-old single mother, had a difficult health situation. In July 2009, doctors had diagnosed her with stage-IV colon cancer and widespread metastasis throughout her abdomen. Shortly after having surgery and beginning chemotherapy, she came to us for supportive homeopathic treatment. Over the next few months, we prescribed remedies to help her recover from surgery, lessen the side effects of chemotherapy, and boost her mood so she could best cope with her situation.

When Vanessa came for her follow-up appointment in December, one of her most significant problems was severe low back pain, which had been developing over the previous few months and which she was treating with daily Fentanyl opiate patches. We didn't know what was causing her pain and were concerned it might be cancer, but since we could find no overt reason for it on PET/CT imaging, we hoped she was suffering from a more garden-variety back pain. We also worried that Vanessa might have become addicted to the pain medicine, a common problem with patients who receive opiates for pain. They get rebound pain as the drugs wear off, leading them to take more and more. In addition to side effects of drowsiness, constipation, and feeling "out of it," opiates may decrease the immune system's ability to fight cancer.

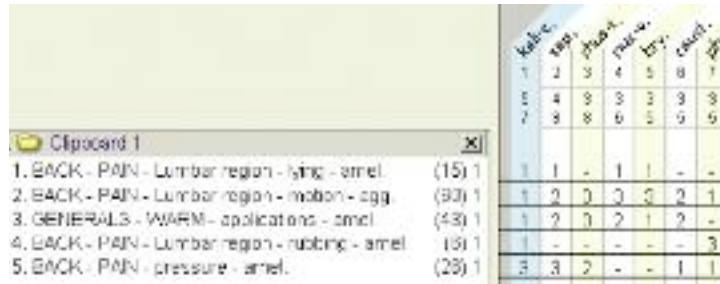
Vanessa's back pain was so intense that it was keeping her from daily activities like exercise and attending her son's school events. In other words, at that time, her low back pain was the most debilitating part of her suffering—"the main thing." So our case taking and analysis focused very closely on the unique and individualizing nature of her low back pain.

Vanessa described her pain as aching whenever she walked, and better when sitting or lying; it felt worse after moving for a while. The pain was on both sides of her back and felt better from rubbing, hard pressure, and heat. It was not affected by the weather or time of day. Based on those symptoms, we prescribed *Kali carb* 30c, 3 pellets, once a day. (See repertorization chart on page 28.) We chose a lower potency

with daily repetition because her pain was more longstanding than Lisa's or Jim's acute back pain.

Less pain, more energy!

Since Vanessa's back pain had developed slowly over some months and persisted for awhile, we didn't expect her reaction to the remedy to be as quick as Jim's or Lisa's; so we asked her to follow up with us in three weeks. In mid-January



2010, we were pleased to hear that her back pain was 60 to 70% improved. And her energy had increased to a normal level for the first time since beginning chemotherapy. "Overall, I've felt better

than I have in months!" she exclaimed. "I'm even thinking about going back to work as motivation to get my life back." Vanessa had dramatically cut her opiate pain medications to a quarter of her original dose. Since her chemotherapy regimen had remained constant and the only new variable was the homeopathic remedy taken once a day, we suspected the dra-

While there are many possible choices in the homeopathic treatment of low back pain, here are the remedies we tend to use most frequently at the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine's clinic:

Rhus toxicodendron: Consider *Rhus tox* for the person whose back pain comes on after overexertion, especially from lifting something too heavy. The pain is aching and the low back is stiff. It is worse from first motion, yet better from continued motion as well as better from hard pressure such as lying on something hard. The person is restless from the pain, which compels them to move constantly or to frequently change positions. The pain may come on with exposure to cold wet air, cold drafts, or before storms, and it is much worse from cold applications. If the person's pain is better from warm applications (often *as hot as possible*), you will likely find a wonderful cure with *Rhus tox*.

Pulsatilla: Back pain requiring *Pulsatilla* is similar to that of *Rhus tox* and should be differentiated from it. The person helped by *Pulsatilla* has back pain that is worse from first motion and better from continued motion and rest, just like *Rhus tox*. Unlike *Rhus tox*, however, *Pulsatilla* back pain is much better from cold applications and worse from warm ones. The person needing *Pulsatilla* tends to be warm-blooded and worse in a warm stuffy room; yet, oddly, they are thirstless with a dry mouth. Although it is not necessary to see *Pulsatilla* mental/emotional symptoms to successfully prescribe it in low back pain, you may see confirmatory symptoms such as timidity, weeping when telling their symptoms, feeling lonely, and being better from consolation.

Kali carbonicum: The person has a sense of exhaustion in the back, or the back may feel broken. Perhaps most important, the pains have a stitching nature and are much better from pressure, yet are worse lying on the affected side (compare this to *Bryonia*). Those symptoms may be enough to successfully prescribe this remedy. The person may also have to walk stooped over, and the low back pain may extend down the thighs. In women, back pain may occur during labor or the menstrual period. They are chilly, may develop a cold sweat on the forehead, and are worse from slight exertion. The pain is worse from cold and better from warmth; and worse from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. or 5 a.m. Those needing *Kali carb* are afraid of being alone and greatly



desire company, like those needing *Phosphorus*; however, those needing *Kali carb* often treat their company poorly, even though they desire their presence.

Bryonia: The person needing *Bryonia* is in extreme, even violent pain, and the pain has a stitching quality. They are worse from the slightest motion and much better from rest and hard pressure. In fact, they often lie on the painful side to maximize the amount of pressure they can apply to the area, while simultaneously minimizing motion. They are worse from warmth and better from cold air and cold applications. Although *Bryonia* back pain is intense, it comes on relatively slowly (e.g., compared to a *Belladonna* case). The person may also have great thirst for cold drinks and may be irritable with a desire for quiet.

Belladonna: Consider this remedy for violent, acute low back pain. The pain is severe and can be burning, throbbing, shooting, or spasmodic. The intense spasms come on suddenly and leave just as quickly. Sometimes those are the only symptoms in the case, and they will lead you to a miraculous cure with *Belladonna*. Sometimes, however, you may observe more symptoms such as being worse from motion or jarring, touch, taking cold, or a draft of air. The person is also worse from lying on the painful side, at 3 p.m., and after midnight, and is better sitting up. In very acute low back pain, you will not typically see the stereotypical *Belladonna* high fever, red face, dilated pupils, or delirious state, nor are those symptoms necessary to successfully prescribe the remedy.

matic improvement could only be attributable to *Kali carb*.

Vanessa was also having a much easier time sticking with chemotherapy now, theoretically improving its likelihood of success because she could tolerate more treatments. Even more exciting was that in mid-January, a PET/CT scan showed only one small metastasis of cancer on the surface of her liver. This made her a candidate for surgical removal, with hope for an

actual cure—a very rare thing in stage-IV colon cancer.

In mid-February, Vanessa's back pain was not responding as well to the *Kali carb* 30c, so we increased the potency to 200c; she then continued to find relief from her pain and feel good overall. In hindsight, *Kali carb* was probably a deeper-acting remedy than we expected because it greatly helped her mood and overall energy, in addition to her back pain. Hah-

nemann discusses this principle in Aphorism 253 of the *Organon*: if the patient improves as a whole person (not just the local pain) and if in the beginning of improvement they feel a "sense of greater ease, composure, mental freedom, higher spirits, and returning naturalness," then you've made a good remedy choice and they are having a positive reaction.

As was true for Lisa and Jim, Vanessa's story illustrates that you will often find a

The 10 Best Back Remedies



Natrum muriaticum: The person needing this remedy feels as if the small of their back is broken, and they feel better lying on a hard surface or firm support (like *Rhus tox*, *Sepia*, and *Kali carb*). If a person has chronic low back pain that includes these symptoms and they also suffer from *Natrum mur*-flavored depression, this remedy will likely cure both conditions. *Natrum mur* depression typically involves grief and or disappointment from love. In sadness, the person dwells on past events and is often resentful or hateful toward someone that caused them grief. They cry alone because they are averse to company and consolation and, oddly, they may laugh over serious matters. They are intolerant of sun and often crave salt.

Sepia: The person needing this remedy has a weak feeling in the low back, and the pain is better with hard pressure, from lying on something hard, from warmth, and, most characteristically, from vigorous exertion. Their symptoms are often worse in the late afternoon from 3 to 5 p.m. If *Sepia* also matches the person chronically, they may have the emotional state of *Sepia*—which includes weeping when describing the back pain. This is similar to *Pulsatilla*, except the person needing *Sepia* is chilly and worse from consolation. The person needing *Sepia* can be indifferent to their loved ones and desire sour or vinegary foods. They love the sun (which helps you distinguish *Sepia* from *Natrum mur*). They can also love thunderstorms and dancing, yet they are intolerant of contradiction and are very sensitive to music.

Phosphorus: The pain is often as if the back is broken

(similar to *Natrum mur*), or it may be a burning pain. The person is often chilly and is anxious about their health or worries about others. They are much better when someone is sitting right there with them, giving them sympathy, and their back pain is better from rubbing/massaging. They have great thirst for ice-cold water. If the person needs *Phosphorus* as their chronic remedy, you may see fears of: thunderstorms, being alone, death, impending disease, or the dark. They may also be extremely sensitive to noise, odors, and light; and they may crave ice-cream.

Sciatica? Consider these!

Magnesia phosphorica: The person needing this will have a classic sciatica pattern of nerve pain extending from the low back down the back of the buttocks and leg. The pain can be cramping (often from overexertion) or sudden, violent, and neuralgic such as cutting, shooting, or sharp, lightning-like pains. When the sciatica is on the right side and is better from warmth and pressure, yet the warmth is more relieving than pressure, consider this remedy.

Colocynthis: This is another classic sciatica remedy. When sciatica is left-sided and the pain is better from warmth and hard pressure, but pressure gives the most relief, *Colocynthis* will often help. In their state of violent pain, the person may be angry, indignant, impatient, and easily offended, and they may want to be alone because their friends irritate them; yet these mental-emotional symptoms are not as necessary to the prescription of *Colocynthis* as are the physical symptoms.

Dosages for back pain

In acute cases, try dosing the medicine every hour or two at first, until you notice a clear easing of the pain. In severe acute pain, I use high potencies like 200c or higher. If there is no relief after a few hours, I try another remedy. In more chronic cases, either start with a low potency like 6c or 30c every day, or give a single dose of a higher potency. I have used both methods successfully. Don't worry too much about the potency choice; the most important thing is finding the best remedy. As illustrated in the four cases presented, acute problems can be expected to resolve rather quickly, while longstanding chronic problems usually get slow and steady improvement over a much longer course of treatment.

remedy to help acute back pain if you focus on the unique and individualizing symptoms of the back pain itself. But Vanessa's case also shows that when you focus on the main concern of the patient's suffering, the improvement may extend well beyond the local symptoms to the whole person!

Using homeopathy to help Vanessa with her debilitating low back pain has been a small, yet important piece of her overall cancer treatment, which combined conventional and alternative care, but she was extremely grateful for our help. We are continuing to treat and support her as she moves forward with her journey to regain her health and her life.

Kim under the knife

Sixty-year-old Kim came to see us in December 2009 for severe chronic back pain. She was heavysset—perhaps 75 pounds overweight—with a very serious, stern demeanor. Doctors had diagnosed degenerative disk disease (herniated disks) and she'd suffered for years, until in 2002, she had lumbar fusion surgery, getting two rods and twelve screws placed in her spine. That relieved her pain for several years. Unfortunately, the unbearable pain had recently returned. By the time she came to us, she'd already tried acupuncture, hydrotherapy, physical therapy, massage,

and TENS electrical stimulation units, with no real relief. The prescription anti-inflammatory drug Celebrex® had helped somewhat, but her doctor discontinued it when liver enzyme tests indicated toxic side effects. About the only thing that took the edge off Kim's pain was the narcotic pain reliever Vicodin®, but she only took it occasionally, explaining, "I don't want to be a Vicodin® junkie." She was now trying Voltaren®, another anti-inflammatory pain reliever, but it wasn't really helping. She described the pain "as if my back is broken," and she felt a little better when she rubbed her lower back.

Not just pain, depression

As Kim related her story, it became clear that back pain was not her only concern. She also sought our help for chronic depression. She could not get out of bed most days of the week and would frequently sleep all day long. "I've been sad for as long as I can remember," she told us, at least as far back as her early teens when "things were not good at my house." She was currently taking the antidepressant Celexa®, "but it's not helping me at all," she lamented.

In her sadness, she preferred to be alone. When friends asked her out, she would decline. She preferred to stay home and binge on junk food and ice-cream. She could not bring herself to exercise or eat healthily. She was extremely hard on herself for being overweight, yet described an inertia that completely blocked her from engaging in lifestyle activities that she knew would be good for her health.

Kim would frequently think about the men she'd dated throughout her life. She would go over these relationships in her mind, rethinking various scenarios and imagining how she could have married and had children, although the relationships had never worked out. "I start to dwell on the mistakes I made and how different my life would be if I'd made other choices," she admitted. "It's in my mind a lot ... I should have married that person, should have had a child, then I wouldn't be alone today, I wouldn't be sitting here by myself at my age." She felt extremely lonely. She rarely cried, but if she did, the crying made her feel worse. She didn't want others around if she cried or felt sad, and she could not stand being in the sun.

Bye-Bye Back Pain

DIY Homeopathy: 7 steps to relieve acute backache

- ◆ First, find out all the details of the "main thing" in the case. If the person's greatest suffering is from their low back pain, then that is the main thing!
- ◆ It is most important to find out the pain's exact location, its sensations, its pattern of radiation, and its modalities (what makes the pain better and worse). The more of these details you obtain, the richer the symptom picture and the easier it will be to find the best remedy.
- ◆ Remember to use open-ended questions like "describe your pain" or "what makes the pain worse?" to get the most reliable symptoms from the person.
- ◆ It is often more important to find out what makes the pain worse rather than better, since the homeopathic repertory reports more aggravating symptoms than ameliorating symptoms.
- ◆ The remedy that *best* matches the specific symptoms of the back pain will usually provide the most rapid improvement, especially in a very acute back pain case.
- ◆ Other important symptoms are any *changes* the person has experienced *since the acute back pain began*. This may include changes in their general temperature (e.g., whether they are chilly or warm), thirst, appetite, sleep, perspiration, or mental/emotional state.
- ◆ Consult your homeopathic references (materia medica and repertory) to find the remedy that matches the person's symptoms. And check out the remedy descriptions on page 28 for the remedies that we find most helpful in our clinic!





Many targets?

In a complex chronic case like Kim's when a person has multiple longstanding problems, it can be difficult to choose "the main thing" on which to focus our case analysis. In these instances, we treat the whole person with the remedy that is most similar to the *totality of the characteristic symptoms of their different problems*. Unlike the typical acute back pain case, the symptoms of chronic back pain are often common and nondescript. If you study the person's case carefully, however, you frequently find that the low back pain symptoms are well covered by the same remedy that matches the other symptoms in the case, such as the person's chronic mental-emotional state. And this was true in Kim's case, too.

were remarkable because we had not made any such suggestions during her first visit—we thought she wasn't ready to hear them. Yet after taking the *Natrum mur*, she'd made the changes on her own! And her mood had definitely improved.

Bad back flare-up

Her back pain was another story, however. She'd only had two days of relief in the past month; and in the last three days, the pain had become excruciating, the worst in 8 years. She described having to lie completely still on her back on a table to relieve the pain.

The dramatic improvements in Kim's lifestyle and depression told us that *Natrum mur* had likely been helping her. But because of the newly heightened severity of her back pain, we checked to see if a different remedy might better match her pain symptoms. *Bryonia* is known for addressing

excruciating pain that is worse with the slightest motion and better with pressure. Often in *Bryonia* cases, the patient prefers to lie on the painful spot because she can both apply pressure and remain still at the same time to get some relief. Interestingly, *Bryonia* is considered an acute remedy that is frequently indicated for chronic *Natrum mur* cases. So we switched Kim's remedy to *Bryonia* 1M, every 2 hours.

Two days later, Kim told us the very intense pain had resolved and returned to her less intense, chronic pain. We felt that *Bryonia* had helped, but she was now back to her chronic state, so we switched to *Natrum mur* again, and increased the potency to 30c, once a day.

Slow, steady wins race

Two weeks later, Kim reported that her depression was better. She was not dwelling on the past as much or getting as down on herself. She was also not procrastinating as much and was enjoying exercising and socializing with friends more.

As for the back pain, she reported some good days and some bad. Overall, she guessed her back pain was 10-15% better. While this may not seem like much, it is a significant improvement in a longstanding chronic case such as Kim's. She was grateful for that relief and inspired to continue with homeopathic treatment.

Kim's lifetime depression and years of chronic back pain may be slow to completely heal. Over the next year or two, she may need a series of different remedies—sometimes acute and sometimes chronic, depending on her symptoms. But the significant improvements Kim has already experienced in both her depression and back pain are very positive signs that homeopathic treatment is helping her.

Back to health

I hope these stories of homeopathic healing from the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine's clinic were instructive. And I hope they inspire you to try your hand at treating uncomplicated low back pain cases! Given the great number of back pain sufferers, you'll have plenty of opportunities to show the world what homeopathy can do!

* A few serious conditions that can be confused with simple acute low back pain include: kidney/urinary infections, inflammatory/autoimmune arthritis, kidney stones, cancer, and compression fractures of the vertebra from osteoporosis. When in doubt or when pain is severe or lasts longer than 4 to 6 weeks, seek medical attention.

** In our experience, homeopathy can be helpful in most cases of acute low back pain. However, we've also found that other treatments including acupuncture, spinal manipulation, physical therapy, hydrotherapy, spinal traction, and physical conditioning can be helpful in certain cases.

	1	2	3	4	
1. MIND - COMPANY - aversion to	(172) 1	4	1	3	5
2. MIND - CONFUSION - agg	(49) 1	1	2	3	1
3. MIND - DREAMS - past disagreeable occurrences, on	(54) 1	4	1	3	2
4. MIND - FORTY-SIXTY feeling	(82) 1	2	2	2	1
5. MIND - LAZINESS	(203) 1	3	3	1	5
6. MIND - RETROGRADING oneself	(50) 1	2	-	2	1
7. BACK - PAIN - lumbar region - broken, as if	(45) 1	3	3	-	2
8. BACK - PAIN - rubbing - amel	(17) 1	1	3	-	-
9. GENERAL S - SHIN - exposure to the sun	(78) 1	3	-	1	-
10. MIND - WEEPING - alone, when	(9) 1	2	-	1	-

Kim's depression symptoms pointed to the well-known remedy, *Natrum mur*; and it just so happens that "back pain as if broken" is a strong symptom of *Natrum mur* (see repertorization chart above). So this remedy covered *both* of her main concerns. We prescribed *Natrum mur* 6c, 3 pellets, once a day. We chose a low potency to give us room to increase potencies in the future, as we suspected Kim might need to be treated with *Nat mur* over an extended period (Kim's disease process didn't come on overnight, and we didn't expect it to go away instantly either).

Up off the couch!

At Kim's first follow-up appointment one month later, we were thrilled to hear she'd made some major breakthroughs in her inertia: she had joined Overeaters Anonymous, started exercising regularly at the gym, and begun walking her dogs outside in the mornings. She had even accepted a few invitations to holiday parties rather than staying home. These lifestyle changes



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie Oskin, ND, is a second year, homeopathic specialty resident at the Southwest Naturopathic Medical Center in Scottsdale, Arizona studying under Stephen Messer, ND, DHANP, MSED. The homeopathic specialty residency is fully funded by a generous gift from Standard Homeopathic Co. He graduated in 2008 from the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine with high honors and then completed a one-year general naturopathic family medicine residency. He can be reached at 480-970-0000 or DrJamieOskin@gmail.com or www.droskin.com.