



NHMRC Statement: Statement on Homeopathy

Based on the assessment of the evidence of effectiveness of homeopathy, NHMRC concludes that there are no health conditions for which there is reliable evidence that homeopathy is effective.

Homeopathy should not be used to treat health conditions that are chronic, serious, or could become serious. People who choose homeopathy may put their health at risk if they reject or delay treatments for which there is good evidence for safety and effectiveness. People who are considering whether to use homeopathy should first get advice from a registered health practitioner.* Those who use homeopathy should tell their health practitioner and should keep taking any prescribed treatments.

The National Health and Medical Research Council expects that the Australian public will be offered treatments and therapies based on the best available evidence.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy is a type of complementary and alternative medicine. It is based on two main ideas: that substances that may cause illness or symptoms in a healthy person can, in very small doses, treat those symptoms in a person who is unwell; and that molecules in highly diluted substances retain a memory of the original substance.

NHMRC's methods

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) undertook an assessment of the evidence of the effectiveness of homeopathy for treating health conditions. This assessment was based on:

- an overview of published systematic reviews by an independent contractor;
- an independent evaluation of information provided by homeopathy interest groups and the public; and
- consideration of clinical practice guidelines and government reports on homeopathy published in other countries.

The assessment of the evidence used standardised, accepted methods for assessing the quality and reliability of evidence for whether or not a therapy is effective for treating health conditions.

This work was overseen by the Homeopathy Working Committee established by the NHMRC. Given their collective expertise in evidence-based medicine, study design, and complementary and alternative medicine research, the Homeopathy Working Committee also provided advice on how the evidence should be interpreted in developing an Information Paper. An approach, similar to that of a Health Technology Assessment, was used to consider the outcomes of the assessment of the evidence. This means that for a treatment to be considered effective, it must result in health improvements that cannot be explained by the placebo effect, and these health improvements must be meaningful for a person's overall health. There must be evidence that the health improvements in people taking the treatment are unlikely to be due to chance and the result must be seen consistently in several studies.

Evidence on homeopathy was collected by identifying systematic reviews which evaluated the effectiveness of homeopathy in treating health conditions in humans. In total, 57 systematic reviews were identified that contained 176 individual studies. Studies were only considered by NHMRC if they compared a group of people who were given homeopathic treatment with a similar group of people

*As defined in the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each State and Territory.

who were not given homeopathic treatment (controlled studies). For each health condition, the evidence reviewers assessed the quality of the systematic reviews using a standard, internationally accepted method, and recorded the number and type of studies that were included in the systematic reviews. Using the information provided by the systematic reviews, the reviewers also assessed the quality of each individual study and its number of participants, taking into account factors that could bias the results in favour of homeopathy, placebo or another treatment.

Additional information was submitted to NHMRC, for consideration as part of its review of homeopathy, by homeopathy interest groups and the public on two occasions: before the commissioned overview of evidence (preliminary submitted literature) and during the review of the draft Information Paper (public consultation submitted literature). The preliminary and public consultation submitted literature was assessed using a similar method to that applied in the overview.

Where a clinical condition had already been considered in the overview, the results from the submitted literature were compared to the conclusions of the overview to examine the consistency of results against the body of evidence. Where a clinical condition had not been considered in the overview, the results of the submitted literature were assessed with regards to their study design, size and different kinds of bias to see if any comment on the effectiveness of homeopathy could be made.

Findings

There was no reliable evidence from research in humans that homeopathy was effective for treating the range of health conditions considered: no good-quality, well-designed studies with enough participants for a meaningful result reported either that homeopathy caused greater health improvements than placebo, or caused health improvements equal to those of another treatment.

For some health conditions, studies reported that homeopathy was not more effective than placebo. For other health conditions, there were poor-quality studies that reported homeopathy was more effective than placebo, or as effective as another treatment. However, based on their limitations, those studies were not reliable for making conclusions about whether homeopathy was effective. For the remaining health conditions it was not possible to make any conclusion about whether homeopathy was effective or not, because there was not enough evidence.

Further information can be found in the NHMRC Information Paper: Evidence on the effectiveness of homeopathy for treating a clinical condition and on the NHMRC website at www.nhmrc.gov.au/your-health/complementary-medicines/homeopathy-review.