

BATCH FLOWER REMEDY AND CLINICAL EFFICACY: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Edward Bach first advocated the use of the Bach Flower therapy in 1930. This system shares certain commonalities with Homeopathy. Dr. Bach has major contribution towards the development of Bowel Nosodes in Homeopathy. He has developed Bach Flower Remedies (BFRs) for distinct emotional states. BFRs are 38 remedies of plant origin commonly dispensed in homeopathic dosage forms. These BFRs are classified into seven groups. Each BFR is indicated for a certain emotional pattern or a typical personality. BFRs have potential for use in nursing care; alternative care for pre-matures; chronic major depressive disorder, emotional imbalances; anxiety, mood changes, and insomnia associated with menopause; and infantile stress and frustration. The present article is an attempt to provide an overview of the BFRs and their potential in therapeutic practice and clinical efficacy.

Keywords – Homeopathy, Batch Flower, Remedy, Clinical efficacy, Herbal medicines

1. INTRODUCTION

The British physician and microbiologist Dr. Edward Bach (1886-1936) created "Bach Flower Remedies" (sometimes referred to as "Flower Essences" or "Flower Remedies") over 80 years ago. Dr. Bach came to believe that negative mental states, such as fear, envy, and despair, are the root of the majority of human disorders. He listed 38 cures, each based on a specific native flower, which, in his opinion, would help to lessen these unpleasant emotions and so improve health [1]. Since then, Bach's devotees have added more flower treatments. Dr. Bach believed in treating each patient as an individual and suggested that two patients with the same conventional diagnosis might receive two distinct treatments.

Flower remedies are produced by dropping fresh flowers into water; this yields the "mother tincture" to which brandy is subsequently added as a preservative. Thus, they do not contain pharmacologically relevant amounts of constituents of the flowers they originate from. Flower remedies thus have similarities to homeopathic medicines, yet there are clear distinctions between the two systems [2]. According to proponents of flower remedies, their mode of action does not depend on molecular or pharmacological mechanisms but on the subtle "energy" that is transmitted from the flowers to this remedy [3]. This "energy" has so far defied quantification, and critics therefore argue that flower remedies are pure placebos [4].

In most countries, flower remedies are marketed not as medicines but as food supplements. Therefore, there is no legal requirement to demonstrate efficacy and no health claims are permitted. Yet there is an abundance of literature on flower remedies which does make such claims. Customers are thus attracted to flower remedies with certain expectations, and the question arises whether this has the potential for causing harm to patients. Due to their highly dilute nature, flower remedies are devoid of toxicology. However, flower remedies may be used in cases of severe illness as an “alternative” to effective therapy. In such a scenario, the use of flower remedies could become life-threatening [5].

The preparation of Bach remedies utilizes two methods: the sun method, where flower heads are floated on the surface of water contained in a glass bowl, left in the sunshine; and the boiling method in which plant matter is boiled. In both cases, plant matter is subsequently removed and the remaining water filtered and mixed with an equal quantity of brandy (alcohol content 40% v/v). Bach originally potentized the first of the flower remedies homeopathically, but this was later abandoned in favor of the “simple and more perfect method of potentization” described above [6].

In both preparation methods, the plant matter is removed, and, according to Bach, the water retains the vibrations or energy of the flower. The liquid, called the mother tincture, is filtered and mixed with brandy, which acts as a preservative. The remedies can be taken orally diluted in a glass of water, or applied directly to pulse points such as the wrists, temples and behind the ears. They can be used individually or in combination with up to seven other tinctures. BFRs do not contain pharmacologically relevant remnants of the original flowers and are considered safe to use in combination with other medications, as well as by pregnant women, children, babies and the elderly. However, it has been suggested that BFRs could be dangerous for recovering alcoholics due to their alcohol content [7-11]. This article is compilation of previously published information related to batch flower remedy and its clinical efficacy.

2. FLOWER REMEDIES USED

According to Bach, the remedies work through the life force energy or vibration that is transmitted from the flowers to the tincture. This vibration interacts on a subtle energy level with the individual to rebalance the conscious and unconscious and dissolve old patterns of behavior.[12] By alleviating negative feelings and relieving the underlying emotional and psychological problems of the patient, a physical healing is enabled. Patients sometimes experience a worsening of their symptoms before an improvement, which can manifest as aggravation.[13].

The 38 Bach flower remedies and their respective indications are summarized in Table 1. Bach's 38 flower remedies each address one of the seven psychological causes of illness: fear, uncertainty, insufficient interest in present circumstances, loneliness, oversensitivity to influences and ideas, despondency or despair and over care for the welfare of others. The individual patient is prescribed particular remedies depending on the acute problem at hand, which should be individually tailored and adjusted during the course of therapy, typically over weeks to months. For example, the flower 'impatiens' is used for impatience and irritability, 'mimulus' for fear of known things, shyness, and timidity, and 'olive' for those that are drained of energy. In addition, some BFRs are categorized as "type" remedies and are specific to a certain character trait or disposition. A person who suffers from overwhelming guilt might be offered pine as a type remedy, and chronically indecisive people could benefit from Scleranthus. Three BFRs are helpful to unblock the energy flow in patients without obvious symptoms: Wild Oat, Holly, and Star of Bethlehem. Because the relief of anxiety is a major factor in pain relief, proponents of BFRs have suggested that BFRs also have the potential to function as a therapeutic agent for pain. "Rescue Remedy", also known as "Five Flower Remedy", is the only

combination of BFRs determined by Bach himself and functions as an all-purpose emergency agent in situations of acute anxiety or distress. It contains a mixture of star of Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum umbellatum*), rock rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), impatiens (*Impatiens glandulifera*), cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera*), and clematis (*Clematis vitalba*). Rescue remedy is recommended as a first aid preparation for situations where acute stress is likely to occur [14].

Training as a Bach Flower Remedy practitioner is offered through the Bach Foundation in the UK and at other centres in Europe. [15,16] The courses are designed for therapists in similar fields who would like to incorporate BFRs into their practice. BFRs are also available "over-the-counter "in some countries, and on-line through several websites.[17].

Table 1: The Bach flower remedies and their indications

Flower	Indications
<i>Agrimony</i>	Mental Torture Behind a Cheerful Face
<i>Aspen</i>	Fear Of Unknown Things
<i>Beech</i>	Intolerance, Perfectionist
<i>Centazry</i>	The Inability To Say 'No'
<i>Cerato</i>	Lack Of Trust In One's Own Decisions
<i>Cherry Plum</i>	Fear Of The Mind Giving Way, Fear Of Losing Control
<i>Chestnut Bud</i>	Failure To Learn From Mistakes
<i>Chicory</i>	Selfish, Possessive Love, Needs The Appreciation Of Others
<i>Clematis</i>	Dreaming Of The Future Without Working In The Present, Absentminded
<i>Crab Apple</i>	The Cleansing Remedy, Also For Self-Hatred, Poor Body Image
<i>Elm</i>	Overwhelmed By Responsibility, Pressures Of Work
<i>Gentian</i>	Discouragement After a Setback, Pessimism
<i>Gorse</i>	Hopelessness And Despair
<i>Heather</i>	Self-Centredness And Self-Concern
<i>Holly</i>	Hatred, Envy And Jealousy, Feels Victimized
<i>Honeysuckle</i>	Living In The Past, Overwhelming Nostalgia For The Past
<i>Hornbeam</i>	Procrastination, Tiredness At The Thought Of Doing Something
<i>Impatiens</i>	Impatience
<i>Larch</i>	Lack Of Confidence, Competent But Fear Failure
<i>Mimulus</i>	Fear Of Known Things, Shy, Nervous Personality
<i>Mustard</i>	Deep Gloom For No Reason
<i>Oak</i>	The Plodder Who Keeps Going Past The Point Of Exhaustion
<i>Olive</i>	Exhaustion Following Mental Or Physical Effort
<i>Pine</i>	Guilt, Self-Blame
<i>Red Chestnut</i>	Over-Concern For The Welfare Of Loved Ones
<i>Rock Rose</i>	Terror And Fright, Useful For Nightmares
<i>Rock Water</i>	Self-Denial, Rigidity And Self-Repression
<i>Scleranthus</i>	Inability To Choose Between Alternatives
<i>Star of Bethlehem</i>	Shock, Loss, Bereavement, Trauma
<i>Sweet Chestnut</i>	Extreme mental anguish, when everything has been tried and there is no light left
<i>Vervain</i>	over-enthusiasm, perfectionism
<i>Vine</i>	dominance and inflexibility
<i>Walnut</i>	protection from change and unwanted influences, birth, puberty, divorce
<i>Water Violet</i>	pride and aloofness
<i>White Chestnut</i>	unwanted thoughts and mental arguments, unwanted thoughts, unable to concentrate
<i>Wild Oat</i>	uncertainty over one's direction in life
<i>Wild Rose</i>	drifting, resignation, apathy
<i>Willow</i>	self-pity and resentment
<i>Rescue Remedy</i>	Composite remedy consisting of Star of Bethlehem, Rock Rose, Cherry Plum and Clematis; for emergencies to combat fear, panic, shock and fear of losing control

3. CLINICAL EFFICACY

In a 2002 database review of randomized trials Edzard Ernst concluded:

The hypothesis that flower remedies are associated with effects beyond a placebo response is not supported by data from rigorous clinical trials. All randomized double-blind studies, whether finding for or against the solutions, have suffered from small cohort sizes but the studies using the best methods found no effect over placebo.[18, 19] The most likely means of action for flower remedies is as placebos, enhanced by introspection on the patient's emotional state, or simply being listened to by the practitioner. The act of selecting and taking a remedy may act as a calming ritual.[18]

A systematic review in 2009 concluded:[19]

Most of the available evidence regarding the efficacy and safety of BFRs has a high risk of bias. Based on the reported adverse events in these six trials, BFRs are probably safe. Few controlled prospective trials of BFRs for psychological problems and pain exist. Analysis of the four controlled trials of BFRs for examination anxiety and ADHD indicates that there is no evidence of benefit compared with a placebo intervention.

A newer systematic review published in 2010 by Ernst concluded:[20]

All placebo-controlled trials failed to demonstrate efficacy. It is concluded that the most reliable clinical trials do not show any differences between flower remedies and placebos.

Flower remedies are sometimes promoted as being capable of boosting the immune system, but "there is no scientific evidence to prove that flower remedies can control, cure or prevent any type of disease, including cancer".[21]

4. RISKS AND POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

Since flower essences are diluted solutions, they're generally considered safe. But like all remedies, essences can still cause unwanted side effects. Practitioners say this might include skin rashes, fatigue, headache etc. According to flower therapy, these side effects may happen when the flower essence "wakes up" your emotions. The effects will allegedly go away within 1 day. Also, most flower essences have a small amount of alcohol. While most practitioners say they're safe if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, it's still best to use caution. If you're pregnant or breastfeeding, check with your doctor first or use an alcohol-free version.

5. CONCLUSION

Flower essences are a form of herbal medicine used in flower therapy. They're believed to contain the vibrational energy of flowers, which can improve negative thoughts and emotions. There's usually no harm in using them, but most do have a tiny amount of alcohol. Use an alcohol-free version if you're pregnant or breastfeeding. Some studies say flower essences can ease anxiety and pain, but more research is needed.

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