

Duality and opposites

a key theme of three lesser-known remedies which can have a powerful effect on body and mind, profiled by *Marysia Kratimenos*

The Umbelliferae (Apiaceae) were the first botanical family to be classified by Carl Linnaeus in the 16th century and there are over 3000 species throughout the world. They are more common in temperate climates. Many are familiar to us as food crops: carrot, parsley, celery and angelica. Others are used as spices: dill, coriander, caraway and anise, or as culinary herbs: chervil, fennel and parsley. The same family contains many deadly poisons, like hemlock. The plants are either highly fragrant or emit a foetid smell. The theme of duality is rife in the remedies made from this botanical family. Homeopathic remedies are made from 33 plants from this family, but few other than *Conium maculata* and *Cicuta virosa* are commonly used.

The family name Umbelliferae is derived from the Latin *umbellula*, meaning little shade and alludes to the arrangement of flowers in parasol-like clusters. The *Eryngium*, commonly known as sea holly, is the only species that has a different floral pattern. It is a beautiful ornamental garden plant, with glorious spiky blue purple flowers, which dry out due to their air-filled stems, and so can be used in flower arrangements. The other plants in the family look very similar indeed: non-descript and fading into the background. It is even difficult for botanists to identify the different species; they rely on location and size, but frequently have to check plant chemistry to be certain. They all have flowers in varying shades of white.

People requiring one of these remedies as a constitutional will often lead very quiet lives, never attracting atten-

tion to themselves. Indeed one of my patients complained that no one ever remembered if she'd been to a party or not – she described herself as the proverbial wallflower. She dressed in a very conservative way, often in shades of cream and white, just like the remedy she required. She longed to be noticed, and yet would never consider dressing with more flamboyance, like the *Eryngium*.

The typical flower is divided into five sepals, five petals and five stamens, and the seed cases are divided into two halves each with five external ridges. In numerology the number five is associated with change. In a healthy state this leads to liberty, equality, fraternity, curiosity, adventure, emotional and sexual exchange. A negative five means the person holds on to situations and people, postpones things, has an aversion to challenges, avoids change and exchange, and lives in seclusion and withdrawal. The leaves are arranged in a centrifugal pattern on a hollow stem. Using the Doctrine of Signatures, this is said to betray a tendency to self-centredness, which is frequently seen in those that require treatment with these remedies.

The root of the plants is fleshy, as clearly seen in the edible members of the family, such as the carrot and parsnip. The seeds are dry and hard, reminiscent of the warts and stony hard tumours they are often used to treat. The seeds act on the digestive system to prevent accumulation of gases. Fennel tea is used to soothe the stomach and reduce gas and aniseed is made into Ouzo and Pernod liqueurs, which aid digestion. These herbs all stimulate the secretion

of the body fluids: sweat, urine, flatus and wind, in varying degrees.

Constitutional types

People requiring constitutional treatment with the Umbelliferae have great problems with communication, both on a physical and emotional level. They find it hard and painful to talk. They lack trust, especially in doctors, which can make the consultation quite challenging. They can come across as very angry, resentful and demanding, having a great need to be heard, and feeling neglected and over-looked however much time one spends with them. They resent being ill and dependent on others, so they want miracle cures, preferably yesterday!

They are highly-strung; their nervous system reacts to every sound. Young children can even start to fit at the slightest noise. As a protective measure to this highly reactive state they often “numb out” in later life. If subjected to any trauma, they tend to block out the pain by a total sensory withdrawal, and suppress all feelings and emotions.

They fear old age, and dream of mummification. Many develop pathological fears of hitting 40, 50 or 60. They will go to extreme lengths to preserve their looks. Certain Hollywood actresses might well benefit from one of these remedies to stop their addiction to plastic surgery. One in particular has had her face so stretched that she does resemble a mummy!

They dislike the role of motherhood, maybe because they fear the pregnancy and subsequent feeding will adversely affect their bodies. In fact many admit they detest the sensation of pregnancy.



Photo: iStockphoto.com

touch; he doted on her from afar. Her long-standing fatigue responded well to the Conium. I could just picture her lying sedately on a *chaise longue*.

Many people requiring the Umbelliferae suffer with ritualistic or superstitious behaviour, which may extend into obsessive compulsive disorder. It is a means by which to bring order into a chaotic world, a psychological defence mechanism.

Aethusa cynapium

Aethusa cynapium can be easily confused with *Silica terra*. Both are useful in treating children with intolerance of milk, even mother's milk. Both are helpful in dry skin conditions with recurrent infections.

The herb is also known as fool's parsley. It resembles garden parsley, but its leaves are darker and glossier and when crushed emits a garlic-like scent. It is poisonous due to the presence of coniine. The dried herb loses most of its toxicity. It is indigenous to Europe and Siberia.

If ingested it leads to a burning in the mouth, throat and whole gastrointestinal tract. It leads to colic, diarrhoea, then violent convulsions with tremor. Death occurs from paralysis of respiration muscles and the heart. If a sub-lethal dose is ingested, there is loss of the nails and hair. Most animals tend to give it a wide berth due to its smell, but rabbits, sheep and goats appear to be resistant to its toxicity.

One child that responded wonderfully to this remedy was brought to me with failure to thrive and eczema. He was a tiny baby, although he had been born full term. He was nine months old yet looked like a tiny wizened old man. His skin was appalling. Despite the best efforts of his loving parents, it was a mass of open sores and scratches. No creams or lotions could control the extensive dryness, and the itch was intolerable. Raj would vomit with every feed and was losing weight at an alarming rate. His mother had stopped breastfeeding and was in the process of trying every formula milk on the market. None suited. He sat impassively with his mother, staring with wide intelligent eyes. It was this lack of communication and bonding to his mother that alerted me to the possibility of *Aethusa*. Raj's mother was beside herself with worry, she obviously doted on her son and yet he showed no reaction to her. She complained he was more interested in the neighbour's cat. *Aethusa* patients have a deep love of

They are prone to recurrent miscarriages or may seek therapeutic terminations. If they do have a child, breastfeeding is a real issue, and the lack of milk makes it impossible to nurture the child. They repeatedly take the sick child to the doctor, insisting on immediate cures.

The theme of duality and opposites also extends into the sexual realm. There is often increased desire but impotency or frigidity, episodes of sexual excess or total celibacy; often a subliminal "look, but don't touch" message is sent out.

The behaviour may be childish and immature, in speech, behaviour and emotional development. Grown women dressing in clothes more appropriate for early teenagers – the mutton dressed up

as lamb school of style! One lady who came for treatment for her vertigo and responded to *Conium maculata* beautifully, showed this characteristic to its full. She would swan into the room, with her partner who doted on her and would act like a mixture of a manservant and protector. She dressed in 20s-style clothes, billowing chiffon scarves adorned her petite frame, the room was filled with the scent of expensive French perfume and on her head was perched an ornate period hat. She reminded me of Mia Farrow in the film, *The Great Gatsby*. Perfectly made up and manicured, she was in her late 80s and yet spoke a breathless child-like voice. Her partner was not allowed to

Aethusa cynapium is useful in treating children with an intolerance of milk (posed by models)



Photo: Plantapile, Germany

In the first century Conium maculata (hemlock) was used medicinally for tumours

animals, preferring them to people.

I suggested soya milk formula, and this was tolerated, and Aethusa cleared his skin. He began to open up to his mother and a relationship was eventually formed. Despite his challenging start to life, he did gain weight and reached his developmental milestones. He's now at school, a petite but far healthier little boy.

Cicuta virosa

Cicuta, the water hemlock, is a highly toxic plant. Humans die within an hour after two or three bites of these "parsnips". Death is by violent convulsions. A sub-lethal dose leads to heart and skeletal muscle damage. Native American women used it as a means of suicide to avenge the bad treatment of their husbands, leaving them to reproach themselves for their death.

Cicuta is very useful in treating epilepsy, alongside conventional treatment. One young man with epilepsy came to see me as the anti-epileptic drugs were not controlling his fits. The fits had started after a head injury, an indication for the Umbelliferae – ailments following injury or contusion. He would have a weird feeling in the gut before each seizure, and the slightest touch would intensify the fit. He was quiet and unassuming, a person who would not stand out in a crowd. His fits would get worse every time his older brother bullied him, and he took delight in announcing that his brother "caused" his fits. The brother would taunt him and belittle him, and Peter's "revenge" was having a seizure. The Cicuta reduced the frequency and severity of the fits dramatically. As for the

sibling issues, Peter is managing to stand up better to his brother, and walking away from confrontations rather than internalising his feelings of resentment.

Conium maculata

The poison hemlock was used to execute Socrates in Ancient Greece. He died from an ascending paralysis of muscles and convulsions, as described by Plato. Conium has narcotic properties similar to Belladonna, which eases the pain of death.

In the first century hemlock was used medicinally for tumours and, as late as the 19th century, was used to ease the pain of cancer as it is today in homeopathy.

It is a commonly used remedy for hard (scirrhus) breast tumours that occur after a blow to the breast. These are more frequent in older women, especially spinsters and nuns. Conium was used in the Middle Ages to suppress sexual feeling in the nunneries and monasteries.

One patient, Pamela, suffered from recurrent loss of her voice. No cause had been found for this problem, despite extensive tests. It was put down to "hysteria" by an unsympathetic doctor.

Pamela was middle-aged, had never married and was devoted to caring for her elderly father and widowed aunt. Her

sisters had left home to marry, leaving her to be the care-giver. She had no regrets that she had never married or had a life outside of caring for her relatives. She had gladly given her life to the service of God and family. Indeed she felt blessed to have a purposeful life. She was deeply devout and dressed accordingly; no bare flesh was exposed even on the hottest day. She showed no signs of emotion when describing her life or her condition. Her voice was very weak and would rapidly fade away to a mere whisper. Despite her age, she had a fragile, innocent quality to her. In the past she had suffered with numerous benign breast lumps, "as hard as little nuts".

Conium brought back her voice and she began to express herself more fully. It transpired that her father and aunt were both extremely demanding, nothing she did was good enough. She tolerated their foul moods with a saintly patience, praying to God for more tolerance, but inside she would seethe at her Cinderella-like status.

Pamela managed to pluck up the courage to ask for help from her sisters, which they gladly gave, so she could have short periods of time for herself. She takes the Conium fairly frequently to keep herself calm and tolerant.

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