

Homeopathy ineffective for treating any health condition, meta-study finds

Australian scientists reviewed 176 papers on homeopathic treatments, finding many no more effective than placebo

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Health experts in Australia said they have completed an exhaustive review of available research on homeopathic medicine, resulting in one very simple conclusion — it doesn't work.

Researchers at the Australian government's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) were tasked with looking at a total of 176 controlled studies into how effective homeopathy is in treating patients with various complaints. [The results](#), published Wednesday, found “no reliable evidence in humans that homeopathy was effective for treating the range of health conditions considered.”

As such, patients should not turn to homeopathy to treat health conditions that are “chronic, serious, or could become serious,” the study found. “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,” the authors of the report added.

For some health conditions, a review of the studies showed that homeopathy was no more effective than a placebo, the report said.

Homeopathy is a system of alternative medicine developed in Germany at the close of the 19th century, based on the idea that, as the report explains, “the 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.”

[The U.S. National Institutes of Health website](#) says the practice is based on the principle of “the law of the minimum dose” — that the smaller the dose of a homeopathic treatment, the more effective the substance is.

“Many homeopathic remedies are so diluted that no molecules of the original substance remain,” [the NIH adds](#).

Homeopathy has proved popular, primarily in Europe but also around the world.

The U.S. government estimated in 2007 — the last year for which figures were given — that some 3.9 million American adults and 910,000 children had used homeopathy within the last year, shelling out \$2.9 billion on homeopathic medicines sold over-the-counter and \$170 million on visits homeopathic health experts.

Of the studies reviewed, many were found to be poorly designed in that they weren’t controlled, and merely looked at the impact on people who took homeopathic medicine, without comparing results to those who did not. As a result, those studies were discounted from the government body’s analyses as unreliable.

Often, research in which homeopathic drugs appeared to show good results fell into this category, the NHMRC said.

In the United States, homeopathic medicines are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). But the government body doesn’t actually evaluate their safety or effectiveness, [according to the National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#). Instead it merely requires that homeopathic remedies list all their ingredients and the number of times the active ingredient was diluted. In addition, if the homeopathic medicine is meant to treat a problem more serious than a cold or asthma, a prescription is required.

Paul Glasziou, a professor at Bond University in Australia who chaired the NHMRC’s Homeopathy Working Committee, told the Guardian newspaper that

he hoped the report might lead pharmacists and health insurers to think twice about stocking or allowing reimbursement for homeopathic treatments.

“There will be a tail of people who won’t respond to this report, and who will say it’s all a conspiracy of the establishment,” he said. “But we hope there will be a lot of reasonable people out there who will reconsider selling, using or subsidizing these substances.”

[The American Institute of Homeopathy](#) was not immediately available to respond to Al Jazeera’s request for comment on the meta-analysis. [The National Center for Homeopathy](#) said in an emailed statement that "we are a consumer membership organization, not a research group, so it's not our practice to comment on particular research reports. We represent a community of over 12,000 consumers who have found homeopathy significant enough in their lives to pursue more information about it."

It added that NCH's website lists available research studies about homeopathy, "including a large library of studies showing homeopathy's effectiveness."

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