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Can Flower Remedies Cure Binge Eating?

Weekly advice from our herbs and alternatives expert

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By Sara Altshul

The world is full of things that don't make sense. Among these, if you ask me, are flower remedies.

Flower remedies were created in 1930 by a sickly British surgeon named Edward Bach who closed his London practice when he was 43 and moved to Wales. There he spent lots of time in his garden and decided that a dewdrop, when heated by the sun, could acquire the healing properties of the plant it touched. Follow me so far?

During the next four years, the good doctor wrote a book, *Heal Thyself*, which suggests that disease emanates from "being at odds with one's spiritual purpose." He also perfected a line of 38 remedies made from flowers. The process, as I understand it, is that a single flower is placed in pure spring water in the sun. That water is then diluted with more water, preserved with alcohol, and bottled.

How flower remedies are supposed to work

The remedies defy my ability to make sense of them—unlike herbs, which contain phytochemicals that have documented physical effects on the body, or homeopathy, in which a minuscule amount of medicine is used to trigger healing. Those, I understand.

Flower remedies target emotional mind-sets instead of physical conditions, and practitioners theorize that when you set your emotional house in order, healing commences.

Here's where it gets tricky: According to flower-remedy philosophy, different flowers have different attributes that can ease human emotional turmoil. For example, the plant impatiens wilts rapidly when dry, and its flowers close. Voilà! It's the ideal remedy for someone who's impatient.

OK, that I get, sort of. But other qualities (all of which Bach is said to have observed in his garden) seem pretty inscrutable to me—wild rose, for example, is a remedy for people who are apathetic and disinterested; holly helps people who feel angry or want revenge.

A shrink helps me make sense of it all

Denise Lamothe, PhD, from Exeter, N.H., is a clinical psychologist and author of *Taming of the Chew: A Holistic Guide to Stopping Compulsive Eating*, who uses flower remedies in her practice. Though she wasn't able to help me connect the scientific dots when I asked her how the remedies work, she did enlighten me with two interesting stories about how she's used the remedies in her practice.



(ISTOCKPHOTO)

One patient, whom Lamothe was treating with flower remedies for an eating disorder, called her in a panic one day. "I binged on Thursday," the patient reported. "I really overate." When Lamothe asked what she'd eaten, she replied, "Three clementines." Lamothe says this was huge progress for her patient, who prior to using flower remedies would have baked and eaten an entire cake or a dozen muffins.

"Even though my patient still 'binged,' I believe the flower remedies helped her make healthier choices," Lamothe says.

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Lamothe reports that she's even used flower remedies on her registered therapy dog, a Westie named Sapphi. Out of the blue, the dog began compulsively licking her paws, a condition known as "overgrooming." Lamothe gave her a few drops of the remedy crab apple, used for people who feel "unclean, ashamed, or embarrassed about their appearance," and just like that, Sapphi's licking problem ceased.

"Dogs aren't influenced by the placebo effect," Lamothe tells me, "so obviously, on some level, these remedies work."

Though the science on flower remedies is nonexistent, and [clinical studies fail to show a benefit](#) for improving psychological problems or pain, stranger things have happened. If taking a simple, inexpensive flower remedy can help prevent someone from chowing down on an entire cake at a single sitting, I say it might be worth a try.

To that end, Bach developed the Emotional Eating Support Kit, which contains three different flower remedies to nip binges in the bud. It contains crab apple, to help you accept imperfections and feel better about yourself; cherry plum, which supports rational choices; and chestnut bud, which helps you observe mistakes so you can learn from them and move on. Find Bach's remedies at health-food stores and read more about them at [bachremedies.com](#).

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