

Dr Bach did not see the remedies as traditional medicines, to be used only as directed, but as natural resources like air, water and food, that people can call on whenever they need to. His colleague and biographer Nora Weeks remembered him saying that taking a remedy should be as simple and obvious as eating a lettuce when we are hungry. This means that the remedies can become part of our everyday lives. We can take them at work and at home, when we are travelling and when we are standing still. Every time we feel under pressure or unhappy there is a remedy to bring us back to ourselves. This preventative use of the remedies helps us stay in balance so that disease is less likely to strike.

**Research**

Nobody knows exactly how the remedies work. In Dr Bach's time people talked about vibrations, and he would have been very interested in the ultrasound machines used by modern clinicians to see inside the human body. These work on the principle that different parts of the body vibrate at different pitches, and that sound waves can alter these bodily vibrations. Perhaps the remedies work in the same kind of way, each one relating to the different vibration rate of a particular emotion.



**Figure 1.1** Ultrasound machines work because our bodies vibrate at different pitches

Nowadays the preferred description of the remedies' active ingredient is that it is a 'subtle energy'. Evidence for this includes some intriguing Kirlian photographs, published in Germany, that seem to show different characteristic patterns associated with different remedies. But Kirlian photography, which involves passing electric currents through an object placed on a photographic plate in order to record the resulting corona, has its detractors. Sceptics don't take it seriously as a scientific process. And until somebody does establish an accepted way of measuring emotional vibrations and subtle energies the forces involved will remain theoretical concepts, little more than metaphors for something that we don't understand.

The lack of a measuring device, along with the lack of clinical research into the remedies, has led to accusations that they are just placebos, and that their only effect is to give people the illusion of control. Defenders of Dr Bach's work could point to the way people use remedies to help animals and young babies, both groups largely immune to the power of suggestion. But the overriding argument that the remedies are more than placebos is that they consistently do what they claim to do, even when people don't know they are taking them. The remedies have helped countless millions since they were discovered 70 years ago. And the few small-scale studies that researchers have carried out have tended to show positive results.

In 1979 the Californian researcher Michael Weisglas wrote his doctoral thesis on Bach Flower Remedies, under the title *Personal Growth And Conscious Evolution Through Bach Flower Essences*. Weisglas carried out a double-blind study over a period of six weeks. He assigned 31 people at random to one of three groups, one taking mixes of four remedies, one mixes of seven, and one taking a placebo that did not contain any remedies. He tested the emotional states of his subjects before, during and at the end of the six-week period by using the Lüscher Colour Test, which involves ranking colours in order of preference, and a check list questionnaire containing 300 emotional and mental adjectives. Weisglas found that the group of people taking a mix of four remedies showed a significantly higher degree of self-acceptance and understanding as compared with the placebo group. The group

Stefan Ross, Near the Well Bach Flower Remedies, Helder + Stegmaier 2000

of people taking seven remedies, however, did not do as well, leading Weisglas to suggest that this number of remedies should only be used in extreme situations, as they seemed to set up interference patterns between them.

We could make a number of criticisms of this study. The Litscher Colour Test is generally out of favour as a reliable measure of emotion. The small number of people in the sample groups casts doubt on how far its results could be extrapolated to the wider community. We could also criticize Weisglas' methods of selecting remedies, and the fact that he assigned subjects at random to a group that was obliged to take seven remedies. This is the maximum number of remedies normally recommended, and most of the time people take mixes of three, four or five. It is likely then that people in this group took a number of remedies that they did not need, and this would indeed interfere with the efficient working of the others.

Much of the more recent scientific research on the remedies has been carried out in Italy, where medical doctors have shown a great deal of interest in the remedies. At a conference in Milan in 1999 a number of papers were presented that seemed to show objective proof that the remedies work. Paediatrician Dr S Calzolari spent three years studying 417 children aged between 0 and 14 years, and found that the remedies were very effective in dealing with their emotional problems. Her results also gave objective proof of something that has been remarked on many times, namely the fact that the remedies work especially quickly with younger children and babies.

Another study carried out by Drs D'Auria and Pezza showed the usefulness of Bach Flower Remedies in the control of the psychological components of pain. A third, carried out by Drs Rossi and Setti, showed the action of particular remedies on crystalline substances called phyllosilicates. Rossi and Setti claimed that their unusual approach to evaluating the action of the remedies proved conclusively that the remedies are indeed active substances, each one with its own effects – despite the fact that conventional chemical analysis of remedies shows them to contain nothing but brandy and water. 'Having definitively proved the active potential of Bach Flowers,' they concluded, 'the only thing

left to do is move on to the level of clinical demonstration, and pass from the level of the sensitive, crystalline and inorganic to that of the sensitive, organic and living.' (*La Medicina Biologica*, anno XVII, supplemento al no. 2 Aprile-Giugno 1999 – the translation is the author's.)

Until someone mounts a full-scale clinical trial at the organic, living level of human beings the level of proof will not be enough to convince determined sceptics. There are moves being made in this area, after many false starts, and a trial looking at the use of Rescue Remedy in UK dental practice is planned for early in the twenty-first century. Fortunately there is no need to wait for that, and we can all carry out our own trials of the claims made for the remedies by taking them when we need them. It is as simple as eating lettuce, as Dr Bach might have said.

## Recap

- Flower Remedies are medicines used to balance negative mental states and emotions.
- They were discovered between 1928 and 1935 by a well-respected Harley Street doctor and homeopath, Dr Edward Bach.
- Dr Bach believed that the ultimate cause of disease was a lack of inner harmony, and that by resolving this disharmony health would come back naturally.
- Recent research in the field of psychoneuroimmunology supports the views of Dr Bach and others like him, that emotions have a decisive impact on physical health.
- Nobody can say how Bach Flower Remedies work, but they have proved themselves over time. The few studies that have been done have shown good results.