

# Running on Empty No Longer

## Working holistically with a person who has cancer

by MARY ASPINWALL, Registered Homeopath, ISHom, PCH

IT IS FRIGHTENING TO THINK THAT MOST PEOPLE READING this either have cancer, have had cancer, or have a loved one who has faced it. With cancer one of the leading causes of death in the U.S., any attempt to help someone with this illness can seem overwhelming and intimidating. However, even for those undergoing conventional cancer treatment, working with a professional homeopath can not only ease the side effects of those treatments but also address the bigger picture, leading to greatly enhanced health and well-being. I hope, like me, you will find Rita's story in this article to be one of hope and inspiration.

### What's it all about?

We homeopaths see the living human body as a wonderfully complex entity, and we observe that the energy that animates it—the vital force—is always trying to ensure balance and healing. Then what is cancer about?

Samuel Hahnemann writes in his *Organon of Medicine* that in the presence of a chronic disease, defined as a disharmony in the vital force, the organism tries to “silence the internal disease” by creating a “local malady” in a place that threatens life as little as possible. “The local affection, however, is never anything else than a part of the general disease, but a part of it increased all in one direction by the organic vital force” (Sixth Edition, aphorism 201).

In other words, according to homeopathic philosophy, any illness, including cancer, is an expression of something



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deeper. Eradicating the cancer may be necessary to preserve life, but we have to address the deeper level—the disharmony in the vital force—if the person is to return to health.

### Meeting Rita

In late November of last year, Rita\* asked me to visit her at her home where she was convalescing from surgery. At age 54, she had been diagnosed with breast cancer in the milk ducts of her left breast and, even though she had no family history of breast cancer, had opted to have a double mastectomy. The pathology report after surgery showed that, thankfully, the cancer had not reached her lymph nodes. Together, we looked at her medical history, her parents' medical history, her current symptoms, and what she felt may have contributed to them. At one point, I noticed that she almost knocked over her cup; when I asked her about this she said that recently her coordination was poor in her hands and feet because they felt numb, and she felt clumsy. She hoped this was nothing sinister.

### Flashing lights

Rita had had many “warning lights” that all was not well prior to her cancer diagnosis. She had an ongoing struggle with her blood sugar levels, becoming very anxious and irritable if she didn't eat regularly, but testing had ruled out diabetes. She also suffered from chronic insomnia, sleeping for only half an hour then lying awake for hours at a time.

### Grief rekindled

Rita's son had been killed in a tragic accident when he was only 17. She felt angry with him because she had asked him to let her know when he needed a ride, but instead he had decided to walk along a narrow, unlit road at dusk and was hit by a motorbike. She had managed to reconcile herself to her terrible loss, but sadly, many years later and two years before the tumor was found, a beloved godson died tragically in a fire, and all the pain and sadness from her son's death returned. She said she had been in a “cloud of grief” since hearing the news.

### Dealt a difficult hand but played it well

Although Rita had a great relationship with her husband, daughter, son-in-law,

and grandson, her own childhood had been difficult. Her father was a heavy drinker and gambler with a violent temper. He was also a smoker and had died of lung cancer at 66. Despite all she had been through, Rita remained a very cheerful, strong, optimistic person who loved life, and from the very outset she was adamant that she would survive her cancer.

### Pushing it

Rita had worked very hard all her adult life and had successfully built up her own large company from scratch. She loved to keep active and sometimes would completely (and single-handedly!) change all the furniture around just for something to do. She struggled with anxiety and found that exercise helped her tremendously with this. She was tall, very slim, and in great shape for her age, but her skin was rather sallow. My main concern was that she pushed herself excessively. For example, just a few days after her surgery, despite being exhausted, she was walking two miles daily to regain her fitness. She had always loved to run and had taken part in the London marathon, but I remember thinking, “now she is running on empty.”

### Give me a clue

Many of the symptoms Rita told me about pointed to a profound hormonal disturbance. She had a history of difficulties with PMS, painful menstrual periods, heavy menstrual bleeding, benign cystic breast disease in the left breast, menopausal hot flashes, fibroids, and cystic ovaries (which had led earlier to a full hysterectomy). The way she expressed this gave me a very significant clue: “My hormones have been raging for years.” In analyzing a case, I give lots of points to expressions that link mind and body. Other language she used confirmed the same unresolved emotions. Referring to getting angry with someone, she said euphemistically, “I could murder him” or “I could kill him.”

### To crack the case

One of the things that my homeopathic clients have taught me is that (to shamelessly borrow from Tolstoy) everyone is unhappy in their own way. For example, no two people will experience bereavement in exactly the same way. That is why

it is ill-advised to give a bereaved person routine homeopathic prescriptions like *Natrum muriaticum* or *Ignatia* without fully understanding the person's particular and individual response to their loss. It's unlikely that these “grief remedies” would have helped Rita, because her sense of bereavement was coupled with rage.

Apart from when Rita was hungry or premenstrual, she rarely became outwardly angry, but as she so eloquently put it, her anger continued to rage internally via her hormones. There was a clear and striking connection between her anger, her blood sugar, and her hormones; this insight prompted me to use my homeopathic computer software to search for a homeopathic medicine that matched this symptom picture. I managed to find a prescription that covered everything in her case exceptionally well. It was called *Iodum*.

### *Iodum* (a.k.a. Iodine or Iodine)

Gibson writes: “The oceans are the main reservoir of iodine and of salt (*Natrum muriaticum*), a remedy which shares many characteristics with *Iodum*.” Interestingly, there is only one mention of grief in relation to *Iodum* in 400 volumes of homeopathic remedy information. However, homeopaths don't just treat a particular problem (in this case, Rita's grief, her blood sugar, or even her cancer); we take the whole person into account, and this is why I chose *Iodum*.

### A perfect fit

*Iodum* matched every aspect of Rita's story beautifully. To illustrate, I have grouped all the *Iodum* symptoms I found in the Repertory (a reference work indexing symptoms and remedies) that matched Rita's experience.

#### • Her temperament

Mind; Cheerfulness, gaiety, happiness  
Mind; Industrious, mania for work.

#### • Her tendency to express her deepest emotions through violent language

Mind; Kill, desire to; sudden impulse to.  
(I listen carefully to people's particular expressions, especially if they are repeated, and treat them as an indicator of how they might behave, *in extremis*, if there were no rules, consequences, or societal constraints).

#### • Her blood sugar problems

Mind; Cares, worries, full of; if he does not eat

Mind; Anxiety; when fasting  
Mind; Irritability; if he cannot eat.

• **Her thirst**

Thirst; Unquenchable, constant  
Mouth; Taste; Horrible, Offensive, Putrid, Foul.

• **Her most frequent dream**

Dreams; water.

• **Her love of exercise/running**

Generalities; Physical exertion ameliorates  
Mind; Anxiety; exercise ameliorates.

• **Her many physical symptoms both past and present**

Mind; Anxiety; with palpitation  
Sleep; Sleeplessness; general  
Kidneys; Pain; general; region of  
Rectum; Constipation; alternating with diarrhea

Generalities; Hot flushes of heat over body  
Extremities; Awkwardness

Extremities; Numbness, insensibility  
Female; Uterus; Tumors; general; cysts

Generalities; Tumors; cysts; ovaries  
Generalities; Tumors; fibroma; uterus (fibroids)

Chest; Tumors; mammae

Chest; Cancer; mammae.

**Daily doses**

Rita began taking *Iodum* daily in liquid drops of the LM potency; I prefer this potency scale when there is serious pathology as it gives the body a daily “wake-up call” and works well when other conventional medications are also being used. We began with LM3 (a higher potency) because her vitality was strong. Before taking each dose, she succussed the bottle (i.e., shook it and bashed it on her palm) then diluted a few drops of the remedy in water.

**Removing obstacles**

In cases like Rita's, it is vitally important to give encouragement and support to removing all potential obstacles to a return to health. I encourage my clients to focus on the simple foundations of health: pure water, unprocessed non-toxic food (especially green leafy vegetables and, if possible, home sprouted wheatgrass juice), gentle exercise, relaxation, sleep, having fun, and letting go of worries. A dear friend of mine, Dr. Stephen Gascoigne, once advised me, “Always tell your clients not to worry,” which led me to ask, “What if they are dying?” His answer: “Yes, then especially!”



## Doctor's similar suffering brings new understanding

**L**ike my patient Rita, Dr. Ryke Geerd Hamer, a German doctor practicing in Italy in the 1980s, also lost his 17-year-old son in a tragic accident. Devastated by this sudden bereavement, Dr. Hamer shortly afterwards discovered he had testicular cancer. He wanted to investigate this coincidence so he researched the personal histories of 31,000 cancer patients. Dr. Hamer came to believe that disease is brought about by a shock for which someone is completely unprepared. He considers a tumor to be a biological response to an unusual situation, and that by resolving the original “shock” situation the body can return to normality. While I have no experience with his methods ([www.newmedicine.ca](http://www.newmedicine.ca)), his findings echo the thoughts of holistic practitioners: mental, emotional, and physical aspects are all completely intertwined. For this reason, symptomatic treatment alone can never hope to get to the root cause of our “dis-ease.” The great advantage of homeopathy is that it addresses all aspects of the person and “heals from the inside out.”

**The other best medicine?**

Along with her homeopathic medicine, I delivered lots of funny movies on DVD and a copy of the film, *The Secret*. This features a woman who declined to have chemotherapy or radiotherapy and instead successfully visualized the disappearance of her breast tumor, while watching comedies for three months.

**Let food be thy medicine**

I also put Rita in touch with the local health food store and an organic fruit and vegetable producer. She kept to a strictly macrobiotic diet and did lots of juicing. Friends and family rallied round and kept her supplied with delicious vegetable soups, including the famous Hippocrates soup of Max Gerson (a pioneer in diet therapy for cancer). I am sure all of this helped enormously to boost her natural immunity. I also recommended she have a reverse osmosis water filter system fitted.

**First aid**

Early on, Rita's mastectomy scar became inflamed, but this was quickly resolved by a few doses of *Belladonna* 30c. *Belladonna* is often useful for inflammation where heat, redness, and throbbing pains are prominent.

**A good start**

Once her scars had fully healed, Rita opted to have chemotherapy for a total of six sessions. When we had our first follow-up visit, she had had one session of chemo and had been taking *Iodum* for four weeks. Rita reported, “I feel instinctively that the *Iodum* is helping, and if I forget to take it, there is definitely an increase in the mood swings [related to her blood sugar]. I have been quite well.”

Rita and I ran through her long list of symptoms from our first appointment to assess how she was faring. In the past, she had often worried that something might happen to her remaining son and daughter. She had always had a tendency to worry about her family's welfare and confessed to being something of a control freak, but lately she had begun to “rise above” minor family concerns. She noticed that she had found it easier to say goodbye to her son at the airport recently. Rita's heart could be prone to racing, and this left her feeling very panicky, as if she would suffocate, but this symptom had also improved.

She had suffered for many years with constipation and occasional episodes of diarrhea. Her constipation was now much better and she had had no diarrhea. Whereas before she had had an almost unquenchable thirst, with a horrible taste and dryness in her mouth, now she was much less thirsty, and her mouth bothered her only after eating wheat. The dull con-

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stant ache in her lumbar region was also better. She had told me both her kidneys felt uncomfortable unless she drank so much that her abdomen became bloated. Now, although she was drinking much less than before, her kidneys felt fine and “clean.” She no longer dreamt of water, and she was snoring much less, because she had less congestion. Lastly, her hands and legs felt less numb, and she was no longer clumsy and prone to dropping things. Since *Iodum* is indicated for all these symptoms that were improved, I determined that this remedy was working well, so she continued taking it.

### Sleep, nature's cure-all

Another follow-up six weeks later brought further improvements: Rita's blood sugar had normalized, and her sleep was “a hundred times better.” She had been reading Bill Henderson's excellent book, *Cancer-Free: Your Guide to Gentle Non-toxic Healing*, and begun taking barley powder to increase her blood alkalinity and drinking green tea for its antioxidant properties.

### Coping with chemotherapy

Her first two chemo sessions weren't too bad, but by the third one Rita was very nauseated and her vomit looked black. I prescribed *Cadmium sulphuricum* 30c since this is a “keynote” indication for this homeopathic medicine. [See page 34 for more indications.] She sent me this e-mail after the next chemotherapy session: “The *Cadium sulph* arrived and I have taken 4 tablets so far.

My last treatment was a week ago and so far the sickness spells have not been too drawn out, much much better than the third treatment, where I was laid up for two days. I feel the *Cadium sulph* is helping, which is why I have continued to take it...I feel my emotional state is better and I am happier, more like my old self! So overall, I'm not doing too badly.”

Rita continued to take her daily drops of *Iodum*, as well as her *Cadmium sulph* whenever needed. In these instances, I regard the *Cadmium sulph* rather as a first-aid medicine to counteract the effects of a purely external factor, the chemotherapy. The constitutional medicine, *Iodum*, is still needed throughout, and by giving it in a daily liquid dose, its effects are less likely to be disrupted by conventional treatment.

### Post chemo

By the end of March, Rita's chemotherapy was over and she had started attending a holistic clinic that specialized in detoxification and regular blood analysis. Her energy was much better, and she felt “75% back to normal.” By now totally convinced that *Iodum* was the major factor in correcting her swinging blood sugar levels (and moods!), she was very careful not to miss taking her drops regularly.

### Fantastic finish

Rita is still taking her *Iodum* drops now, some six months later as it still appears to be helping her. She gets a higher LM potency every four or five weeks when her

dropper bottle runs out. She feels an almost immediate difference if she forgets to take her dose, and so she will continue to take it unless the situation changes. She says she is “feeling fantastic.” She gets regular checkups with her oncologist, and the detox clinic also monitors her blood tests carefully. Neither sees any signs of cancer.

### Future plans

While the surgery and chemotherapy removed the tumor, I very much doubt that the many other emotional and health issues Rita had struggled with for her entire adult life—anxiety, irritability, and mood swings relieved by eating and exertion, blood sugar instability, extreme insomnia, constipation, kidney pain, numbness, and more—would also have gone away without the correct constitutional homeopathic remedy. This case shows how widespread the action of a good remedy can be. It also includes successful use of “acute” prescribing alongside “constitutional” care, showing how homeopathy can help with the side effects of cancer treatment while also improving overall health and well-being.

Rita will continue to follow up with her oncologist as well as with her homeopath. I am hopeful that with her inspiringly positive attitude, her many lifestyle changes, and an effective constitutional homeopathic medicine that addresses her longstanding underlying dis-ease, Rita's chances of living a long and full life are now very much enhanced.

\* Not her real name.

\*\* On a related note, I highly recommend the novel, *Gain*, by Richard Powers, as I think it is the kind of book that will change the way people look at cancer and the environment.



## DYING FOR IODINE?

I chose *Iodum* (homeopathically prepared Iodine) for my client purely because the indications from the homeopathic proving (testing) of *Iodum* are similar to the experience and symptoms that Rita described to me. Later, however, I was very interested to learn that a number of experts are linking iodine deficiency to breast cancer—as well as to prostate cancer and other illnesses. For more information, you can search the web for the writings of Guy E. Abraham, MD, David Brownstein, MD, and Donald Miller, MD. Or visit homeopath William Shevin, MD's website at [www.drshevin.com](http://www.drshevin.com) to read his thorough article on Iodine Deficiency.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Aspinwall is a Registered Homeopath who has been working in Europe. A series of homeopathic kits she designed became the best-selling of their kind; see [www.homeopathyworld.com](http://www.homeopathyworld.com) for info and for her free online training course. Since 1995 she has run [www.naturalhealingrooms.com](http://www.naturalhealingrooms.com), a large multi-disciplinary clinic in the southwest of Ireland. Mary is a regular contributor to many magazines, including *Homeopathy Today*. She is relocating to the U.S. with her family and will open a practice in Ventura County, California, this September.



# COMFORT REMEDIES

## Relief for chemo, radiation, & surgery side effects

by MARY ASPINWALL, Registered Homeopath, ISHom, PCH

**D**uring conventional cancer treatment, homeopathy can help to ease the side effects. Homeopathic remedies are very gentle and do not interfere with chemotherapy or radiotherapy, so they are a perfect choice for those who are weakened or who prefer an alternative to conventional "comfort medications."

Success depends on individualizing, and it's important to remember these golden rules of acute homeopathic prescribing:

- Match the symptoms carefully to the best homeopathic medicine you can find.
- Take one pill of a 6c or 30c potency. If you feel better, there is no need to repeat unless the same symptoms return.

Remember, you may need to switch to a different remedy as the symptoms change, to ensure you don't break Rule #1. Ideally, however, you should consult a professional homeopath to prescribe for you. They will not only be able to help you with "comfort medicine," but will also work with you to identify and address the underlying disease that produced your cancer symptoms.

While side effects of conventional treatment vary widely and any of a large number of remedies can be indicated to help, here is a selection of remedies that cover the most common discomforts during such treatment.

### After surgery

**Arnica** helps heal all traumas to soft tissues and is useful after any surgery.

**Bellis perennis** is especially useful after trauma/surgery of the abdomen or breast, when deep soreness is present.

**Staphysagria** may help if the incision site is very painful.

**Phosphorus** can help if there is nausea after general anaesthesia.

**Calendula** is a wonderful antiseptic that reduces the risk of infected wounds. It can be used topically or given internally.

**Belladonna** can nip potential infections in the bud if there is heat, redness, or throbbing in the wound.

**Hepar sulph.** If the person is extremely chilly with a pus-filled, painful wound, this medicine works very well to heal the infection.

**Silica.** Think of this medicine if the wound is infected and pus-filled, but, strangely, painless.

### During chemotherapy

**Arsenicum album.** The person who needs *Arsenicum* feels very cold and restless. Emotionally they may feel distraught, anxious, and despairing, especially if left alone. They are thirsty, taking frequent sips of usually warm drinks, but are likely to vomit food and drink as soon as it reaches the stomach. They may also have diarrhea. Although both the discharges and pains are burning, they are relieved by heat.

**Cadmium sulphuricum** addresses very violent nausea

and vomiting especially when the vomit is black; the vomit may also contain tough mucus and there may be retching and gagging. The person may feel so nauseated that they retch at the very touch of food or drink to their lips. They are extremely exhausted and may feel faint. They feel better when they stay still and quiet.

**Ipecac** (the "diluted" homeopathic preparation of *Ipecac*, not the pure form of *Ipecac* used to induce vomiting) can be very helpful to relieve nausea that is constant and unrelenting. Think of this remedy when vomiting brings a person no relief from their nausea.

**Phosphorus** not only helps with the after-effects of general anesthesia but may also help with side effects of chemotherapy. The person feels thirsty for cold water, but vomits it as soon as it becomes warm in the stomach. They may actually feel hungry during the nausea, but are still unable to keep anything down.

**Tabacum.** The person needing this remedy has tremendous nausea that may feel like motion sickness and be accompanied by vertigo. Cool open air makes them feel better, and they may prefer to be uncovered, even though their skin is cold to the touch. They feel better lying still with their eyes closed.

### During radiation therapy

**Calendula**, known for its ability to heal abrasions and wounds of the most superficial layers of the skin, is sold in topical ointments as well as pills. The pills can be taken internally and/or dissolved in water and applied to a dressing for the wound (or a diluted tincture may be used on the wound).

**Urtica urens** is ideal for superficial, first-degree burns that sting and/or itch. The area feels worse from heat and after bathing. It can be taken internally or applied topically in the same way as *Calendula*.

**Cantharis.** Burns that respond to *Cantharis* are of medium severity and may blister. They are raw and sore and feel better with a cold compress. The pains that respond to *Cantharis* are described as cutting, smarting, and burning.

**Causticum.** Known as a remedy for serious second- and third-degree burns, *Causticum* addresses the deeper layers of the skin. Burns that do not heal in a timely manner, or that are accompanied by symptoms throughout the body, may respond to *Causticum*. The burns may itch, crack, or ulcerate. The person feels better in warmth and worse from cold and wind, and the burn is likely to feel better when it is covered.

**Hypericum.** The primary remedy for damage to nerves, *Hypericum* can ease side effects of radiation when they include shooting pains.

**Radium bromatum.** This is the most specific remedy for radiation burns. The skin may itch and burn; there may be swelling and even ulceration. If there is a systemic reaction, it is likely to include aching pains all over the body, with a sensation of heat, and the person feels better from cool open air.

**Note:** If a person develops nausea and vomiting after radiation, also consider the remedies used during chemotherapy.