

Recovering from Past Trauma and Emotional Wounds

Most people have faced some form of significant trauma in their lives. Trauma comes in many forms and can be both physical and emotional. Accidents, surgery, sexual assault, physical abuse, wartime, and all forms of violence are examples of traumatic events, but abandonment, neglect, ridicule, and persecution can also be major traumatic experiences.

People who have the strong support of family or friends will usually recover from the emotional shock such events cause, but often people don't have the support needed to fully heal from these experiences. This is especially a problem when the trauma occurs within the family.

Unresolved trauma manifests initially in mental and emotional symptoms like obsession, excessive worry, a high level of anxiety, easily becoming irritated or frequent loss of temper and/or bouts of depression. As we'll cover in this issue, unresolved mental and emotional symptoms will eventually become underlying causes of physical health problems. So, whenever a person has chronic mental, emotional, or physical illness, it's always important to look for unresolved trauma as a contributing factor in their ailments.

Understanding Trauma

Trauma is anything which triggers the body's fight-flight-or-freeze response. When frightened by something, the part of the brain known as the amygdala temporarily hijacks our mental functions. The amygdala energizes the body to deal with the situation by trying to fight the danger, flee from the danger, or freeze in hopes the danger will just go away. These responses are immediate and involuntary. They are based on instinct, rather than reasoning.

In face of the fear the body musters energy for action. If the instinct is to fight, energy is spent in the clash. If the instinct is to flee, energy is expended in the escape. When there is no ability to fight or flee, fear freezes the body, leaving us immobile, unable to act, stuck frozen in a highly energized, anxious state.

When the perceived danger that provokes the fight-flight-or-freeze response passes, the amygdala releases control. As it does, we instinctively seek to discharge the emotional tension in the body through strong expressions of emotion. This may take the form of yelling, cursing, weeping, trembling, and sometimes even strong laughter. As the body relaxes, the rational brain regains control and allows us to begin processing the experience to make some sort of sense of it. It also helps us determine how to deal with or avoid similar situations in the future.

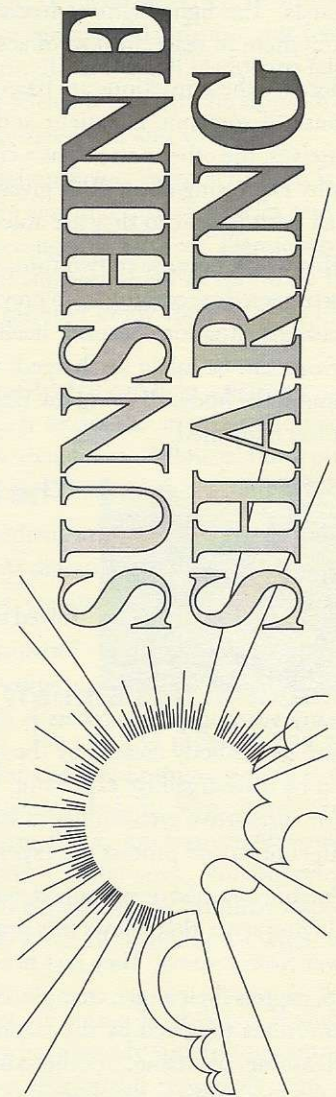
Unresolved Trauma Leaves Emotional Wounds

If the emotional discharge is never allowed to occur, the tension in the body isn't released and the brain is unable to logically process what happened. This undischarged and unprocessed trauma creates a type of emotional wound, which results in subconscious emotional triggers. Situations that remind the brain of the previous traumatic experiences will trigger the fight-flight-or-freeze response, even if no real danger is present.

It's pretty easy to notice other people's emotional triggers. You've probably said or done something that felt innocuous but had someone react with strong emotions that didn't make sense. Maybe they lost their temper over what seemed like a trivial thing, or perhaps they started to cry or just seemed to clam up and not want to interact anymore.

However, if you're being self-aware and honest with yourself, you can start to notice when this is happening to yourself as well. Little things other people say or do can instantly trigger strong emotional reactions.

As we recognize these emotional triggers in ourselves and those around us, it's important to remember that these reactions aren't voluntary. People aren't choosing to have these emotional



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outbursts. The fight-flight-or-freeze response is kicking in and causing them to react, instead of act, in the situation.

Because these reactions are based on the fight-flight-or-freeze response, if someone is patient and listens rather than reacting themselves, the other person has a chance to discharge their emotions by expressing them. This gives their rational brain a chance to kick back in gear so they are able to think clearly again.

This works because of two things. First, the emotions that are being triggered are coming from previously unresolved trauma, not the current situation. Second, healing starts to take place when emotions can be safely discharged, which releases the emotional tension in the body, allowing the rational brain to start processing what has happened.



The Process of Healing from Trauma

The process of healing from unresolved trauma is surprisingly straightforward. It doesn't matter whether the trauma occurred a few minutes ago,

or many years ago, the process is the same. First, the emotional tension in the body created by the fight-flight-or-freeze reactions has to be discharged by expressing the strong emotions in a safe and/or supportive environment. Then, the rational brain has to regain control and process the experience to make sense out of it.

Anyone, trained or untrained, who can create a compassionate and loving space that allows this process to occur can help people recover from trauma. They just need to be able to help someone to cry, express their anger, tremble, or otherwise release the powerful emotions triggered by the traumatic event, without judging, condemning, placating, or otherwise stopping it. Then they need to listen and support the person as they sort out and make sense of what happened. Such help can be provided by a friend, minister, counselor, or therapist. Prayer, meditation and other forms of introspection in a safe environment can also facilitate this process.

Herbal Medicine and Trauma Recovery

Herbs can be important allies in this process, especially in the form of flower essences and essential oils. They can help us process our emotions and aid the self-awareness that helps us make sense of what has happened.

This is because plants are living things, which have to overcome challenges, just like we do. The challenges plants face are primarily physical, such as extremes of temperature, varying levels of moisture, harsh winds or rocky soil, and attacks from insects and animals, but these challenges also serve as mirrors to the struggles we face. As Matthew Wood says in his book, *Seven Herbs Plants as Teachers*, every healing plant is the embodiment of a conflict in the environment that the plant has successfully overcome.

Flower essences, which are energetic preparations made from a plant's flowers, are the best way to use plants for this purpose. They were developed by the English medical doctor Edward Bach. He came to believe that illness arose primarily from conflicts within the soul. He created the Bach flower remedies as a way to help people process these inner conflicts and resolve them.

Essential oils are another tool to help us process trauma. When an essential oil enters the nose, it sends signals into the emotional center of the brain. This can directly influence hormones and neurotransmitters and help us discharge emotional tension and create a greater sense of awareness that helps us process our life experiences and gain wisdom from them.

However, since both essential oils and flower essences come from plants, the plants themselves have these mental and emotional healing properties. Traditional literature is filled with mental and emotional indications for herbs, not just physical ones. Thus, carefully selected herbal remedies, whether used as herbs, flower essences, essential oils, or even homeopathics can aid the trauma recovery process.

Trauma Healing Remedies

Let's look at some basic plant remedies that can help people recover from trauma. The first of these is the *Shock and Injury Flower Essence Blend*. This blend of five flower essences created by Edward Bach contains star of Bethlehem, rock rose, impatiens, clematis, and cherry plum flower essences.

Taken following a traumatic experience, this flower essence blend will help a person pull out of the state of shock and re-center themselves. It brings feelings of comfort and peace to the situation, allowing a person to rationally process what happened.



It can also be helpful when a person is talking about or remembering painful experiences from their past and are triggered into a strong emotional response. In these situations, the *Shock and Injury Flower Essence Blend* can be taken to help them process these emotions more rapidly, with greater awareness and perspective on these events from the past.

There are also several individual flower essences that aid in recovery from trauma. One is arnica, which is used homeopathically to reduce swelling and bruising after injuries. As a flower essence, arnica helps with the problem of disassociation. When something traumatizes us, we often go into shock, a freeze-reaction that makes us feel numb and disconnected from life. Arnica helps us reconnect with the parts of ourselves from which we've disconnected to avoid dealing with painful memories of the past.

Another helpful remedy is black-eyed susan. This flower essence can help a person look into the darker spaces inside of themselves that they're trying to avoid examining. A similar remedy is golden ear drops, which helps a person remember and process painful childhood memories. Both are good remedies for counseling or therapy that is helping a person uncover and heal from traumatic memories and the painful emotions they create.

There are three essential oils that can also aid connecting with and processing painful trauma from the past. They are frankincense, myrrh, and amber. All can be either smelled or applied to the forehead to help a person become more aware of how their past experiences are negatively influencing them in their current life situation. They can help a person calmly and consciously re-

lease negative emotions from these experiences, process traumatic memories, and release the corresponding emotional triggers.

Trauma and Physical Health

Our mental and emotional states affects the function of our bodies. This happens directly through changes in nervous and glandular function caused by our mental and emotional state. It also happens indirectly, as how we feel about ourselves influences our behavior. Unresolved trauma can result in self-neglect (e.g. unhealthy diet, lack of sleep or exercise) or self-abuse.

Besides the basic, trauma-healing remedies already mentioned, there are specific herbal remedies that can help process the trauma that is affecting the physical body. While trauma can be expressed in physical ailments in countless ways we'll focus on three systems which are particularly vulnerable. These are the digestive system, the circulatory system, and the immune system.

Remedies for Trauma and Digestion

The digestive system is activated by the parasympathetic nervous system, which means that slowing down and relaxing while eating is important for good digestion. The fight-flight-or-freeze response activates the sympathetic nervous system, which inhibits both digestive secretions and the motility of the digestive tract.

When someone has unresolved stress from past or current trauma, they will typically suffer from poor digestion, such as a sour stomach, bloating, belching, and constipation. This is recognized in both traditional Western and Eastern medicine. Worry and anxiety, both symptoms of unresolved fear, make it difficult for a person to slow down and relax long enough to eat and properly digest their food. There are many herbs that can help resolve these problems, both physically and emotionally. Here are some important ones.

Peppermint: A great example of a digestive remedy that affects the mind and emotions, peppermint is helpful for people with sluggish digestion, gas and bloating, who tend to have heavy feelings in their stomach from poorly digested food. Peppermint tea, essential oil, or flower essence also works on a sluggish mind.

Someone who needs peppermint experiences brain fog and has difficulty mentally processing their life experiences. Peppermint stimulates their mental processes, improving their mental clarity and focus so they can properly process or digest the life experiences that are creating stress and digestive upset.

Chamomile: Another remedy for both digestion and the nerves, chamomile stimulates digestive secretions, improves appetite, and eases gas and bloating, while calming the nerves and easing stress.

Used as a tea, essential oil, or flower essence, chamomile helps people who are easily triggered into peevishness and complaining, similar to that of a spoiled, whining child. Someone who needs chamomile over-exaggerates their suffering, complains about insignificant things, and finds it hard to be cheerful about life. Chamomile helps them to become more aware and centered, creating a more cheerful or sunny attitude about life.



Dandelion: Frequently used in digestive bitters to stimulate appetite and improve digestive function, dandelion aids hydrochloric acid production and stimulates the gall bladder to release bile to digest fats. It also helps release tension in the stomach and digestive system caused by excessive work and striving.

Someone who needs dandelion flower essence or herb is too busy. They see life as a struggle and find it hard to relax and "go with the flow" of what is happening around them. Dandelion can help them release this tension, allowing them to take time from their busy schedule to relax, eat, and enjoy their food so it can digest properly.

Dill: Another digestive remedy that can help a person process their emotional tension is dill. It settles the stomach and helps a person who is scattered and overwhelmed. Dill helps those pulled in too many directions to relax and become more centered.

Gentian: A common ingredient in digestive bitters formulas, gentian stimulates appetite and digestive secretions. It also helps a person to have faith to persevere after problems, setbacks, and difficult experiences.



Trauma and Immunity

The effect of thoughts and emotions on the immune system is well-documented. In fact, there's even a term for it, *psychoneuroimmunology*. When under stress, cortisol released from the adrenal glands which suppresses the immune response. This is why we are more likely to catch a cold or flu when we're stressed.

People who suffered a lot of abuse as children frequently overproduce cortisol and thus have poorly functioning immune systems. Research also suggests that cancer typically occurs after the patient has suffered a severe trauma that causes them to lose joy in life and suffer deep-seated resentment. Many herbs that boost or support the immune system, can also help resolve the underlying mental and emotional trauma that is weakening it. Here are some important ones.

Echinacea: A popular herb for boosting the immune system, echinacea stimulates immune responses to help the body be more resistant to illness. It also helps to sequester bacterial infections and prevent them from spreading.

As a flower essence, echinacea can help rebuild the shattered sense of self that comes from childhood abuse. Restoring the person's sense of personal integrity and self-worth helps to naturally boost their ability to stand up for themselves, improving immune responses. The herb is also helpful for hard-working people who push themselves too hard, getting sick from physical exhaustion, which forces them to give their body a break.

Yarrow: Used to reduce fevers and aid recovery from viral infections, yarrow also helps people have better emotional defenses. The person who needs yarrow is emotionally wounded in a way that makes them feel overly responsible for others. They possess strong empathy which drives them to try to fix other people's problems. This can leave them exhausted and overwhelmed, which reduces their own immunity and makes them more prone to getting sick.

Yarrow herb, flower essence, or essential oil allows a person to remain empathetic, while also understanding what is their responsibility and what is not their responsibility. It helps them separate their own emotions from the emotions of others and to say no to the unreasonable demands and expectations of others. This allows them to have greater immunity against illness.

Black walnut: Used to fight viral and fungal infections, black walnut is also a digestive remedy because it helps to correct intestinal dysbiosis, get rid of parasites, and heal leaky gut syndrome. However, black walnut also helps a person disconnect from emotional parasites, people who put unreasonable drains on their time and resources. It's especially helpful when those emotional parasites are members of their own family, religion, or community.

Others: There are many other immune remedies that also help with unresolved trauma and emotional wounds. For example, garlic aids the immune system in fighting many types of infections, but it also helps a person who has a hard time standing up to others. It helps weak-willed people learn to speak up for themselves, which boosts their immune responses. Oregon grape contains berberine to fight infections, along with helping people who suffer from paranoia, who project hostile intensions onto others that simply aren't there. In other words, it helps a person not to be hyper-defensive, which also balances immune reactions.

Trauma and Circulation

The circulatory system is also vulnerable to unresolved trauma. After all, emotions are largely experienced through the heart and circulation, which is why emotions are perceived as matters of the heart. This is shown in several ways. Stress increases blood pressure and heart rate. Grief and emotional shock cause peripheral circulation to shut down, leaving us pale and feeling emotionally and physically cold. Excessive anger makes us more vulnerable to cardiovascular disease and people who are lonely and isolated have a greater risk of dying of a heart attack. This is why circulatory remedies can help both the physical and emotional problems.

Rose: Used as a flower essence, essential oil, or herb (rosehips), rose is one of the best remedies for helping to soften the heart and

restore peripheral circulation in people who have experienced intense grief. It comforts the heart and opens a person to love.

Hawthorn: Acting as a cardiac tonic, hawthorn shares some of the emotional healing benefits of rose. Both rosehips and hawthorn berries reduce the irritation that leads to hardening of the arteries, which is associated emotionally with hardening one's heart. They help with processing emotional pain, rather than hardening the heart against future relationships and love.

Flower Essences: There are many flower essences that help heal wounds of the heart. Borage helps the discouraged heart so a person can take heart in times of difficulty. Bleeding heart helps people go through the grieving process so they can release what they have lost and find strength to move on. Love-lies-bleeding is a remedy for people who feel their heart-break is unique and unbearable. It helps them see their loss from a higher perspective and use their experience as a stepping stone to compassion and service.

All of these, and several other helpful flower essences for the heart are found in the *Grief and Sadness Flower Essence Blend*. It can help people heal from the emotional trauma caused by divorce, death of loved ones, and other tragic losses in life that have adversely affected the heart and circulation, resulting in high blood pressure, angina, arteriosclerosis, and other cardiovascular issues.

These are just a few examples of the way plants can be used to aid trauma recovery and physical healing. By understanding herbal remedies in this holistic manner, you can use them more effectively to aid the healing process in yourself and others.

Additional Help and Information

To learn more about helping people heal from past trauma through emotional release, awareness, and herbal remedies, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. Here are some useful references to get you started:

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

The Earthwise Herbal, Vol 1 and II by Matthew Wood

Flower Essence Repertory by Patricia Kaminski and Richard Katz

Creating Your Herbal Profile by Dorothy Hall