

Frequently-asked questions (FAQs)

Here are answers to some of the commoner questions asked:

What is the remedy for asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, headaches, muscular tension etc.?

The Bach remedies don't treat physical complaints directly. Instead they help by treating the negative emotional states that provoke or worsen illnesses.

This means the way to select the correct remedies is always to think about the sort of person you are and about your current emotional state, and forget the physical symptoms.

Are there other ready-mixed remedies apart from Dr Bach's crisis combination?

The only ready-mixed remedy we recommend is the crisis formula, which most makers produce. The best-known brand is sold under the trade name 'Rescue Remedy'.

This mix was prepared by Dr Bach to cover the usual reactions people would have to crises and emergencies. It was intended as an emotional first-aid kit, so after the immediate crisis is over the correct thing to do is to look at the individual response rather than go on taking the crisis combination indefinitely.

Many makers also produce other combinations. Our advice is not to trust them. It is quite wrong to make up the same mixture for everyone preparing for an examination, for example, or for everyone who feels depressed or suffers from insomnia. No two people react in exactly the same way and to reflect this we need to find a personal mix.

Someone said I should take Star of Bethlehem at the same time as the crisis formula. I thought Star of Bethlehem was one of the things in the crisis combination, so why should I take both?

Dr Bach's 'rescue' combination is a crisis remedy - something to keep ready to hand when things have gone wrong. So if you have just been flooded out you might reach for the crisis combination bottle while you look through your contents insurance.

Later, if it appeared that shock was the main emotion, you might switch to Star of Bethlehem alone. You could take both right away - it wouldn't do any harm - but the crisis formula alone would be sufficient for the initial crisis.

An occasion where you might take both, perhaps mixed in a dropper bottle, is if you were suffering from regular 'emergencies' in the form of panic attacks - but could trace them back to a trauma in the past. There would then be clear indications for both remedies.

Generally speaking you should think of the crisis formula as a single remedy with its own indications, rather than as a mix of five remedies.

I'm using the cream version of the crisis formula for eczema and it seems to have got worse. Should I stop using it?

Some eczemas do not respond well to *any* cream. Instead of the cream add Crab Apple, the crisis combination - or any other mix of remedies selected for how you personally feel - to water and use that to clean the area a couple of times a day.

How would you select remedies for somebody else?

The key to selecting remedies is to ask how the person feels right now (rather than yesterday or last year) and also consider the type of person he or she is. Then simply select the remedies that match.

For example, imagine someone who says that she is anxious about a job interview and is displaying her anxiety by becoming irritated with her family whenever they don't do things the way she would. The remedies would be Mimulus to deal with the anxiety and fear, and Beech to deal with the intolerance.

I occasionally have fears during the night, which includes being afraid of the dark. Is this Aspen or Mimulus?

The answer is 'it depends'...

Fear of the dark is a known fear and so indicates Mimulus. But part of the fear could be fear of 'something unnamed' in the dark, or of something that you cannot name happening to you while you cannot see - and that is an Aspen fear.

In the same way, if you hear a noise and think that it might be an intruder, then that would be a known fear and you would take Mimulus, or Rock Rose if you were truly terrified. But if the fear is purely imaginary - you check the house and find nobody, but still feel afraid that 'something' is there - then that begins to be Aspen.

In practice if you can't decide between the two it may be right to take both at once, since elements of both fear can be present at the same time.

How does the depression of Sweet Chestnut compare to that of Mustard? And how does it compare to the hopelessness of Gorse and Gentian's lack of faith?

Gentian is for a mild despondency after a setback. For example, you might have applied for a job and failed to get it. You say 'I might as well give up' - but eventually, with a sigh, you fill in another application form for a different job.

Gorse is when you feel very pessimistic. Something has gone wrong and you decide to give up because there is no point trying again. To use the same example, your responses to not getting a job is to say, 'that's it, I give up' and tear up the other application form.

Sweet Chestnut is different altogether. Dr Bach listed Gentian and Gorse in his 'Uncertainty' group, because in both instances the problem is not genuine despair but rather a lack of faith. If Gentian and Gorse were more certain of their success they would not be depressed at all. The Sweet Chestnut state comes when all avenues really are closed off.

Imagine someone who has failed to get a job. All the time he is out of work the rent remains unpaid. His wife and children are starving. He has no money to travel to an interview and his clothes are too ragged for him to get work in any case. Then the bailiffs arrive to kick them out of the house.

This is absolute despair, the dark night of the soul, when all possible ways forward are cut off. Even suicide would not be a solution because it would mean abandoning his wife and children.

When you imagine Sweet Chestnut like this you can feel at once the clear difference between it and Gentian and Gorse.

As for Mustard, this is the remedy for when everything in life is fine but we still feel gloomy, as if there were a cloud hanging over us. We might have actually got the job that we really want. We should be excited, but our spirits are low. When people ask why we are so down we can only shrug our shoulders.

Can you take the remedies in tea, coffee and so on?

You can put the remedies in tea, coffee, fizzy drinks etc., and in this respect they are not like homoeopathic remedies.

Putting the drops into a hot drink has the advantage of evaporating the alcohol. We sometimes recommend this method to people who for one reason or another dislike the alcohol content.

I have heard that if you take a remedy for too long you will experience the negative state of that remedy.

This is not true. The remedies are entirely positive and cannot under any circumstances cause the negative state to appear.

Do you need to add alcohol to a mixing bottle?

Alcohol helps stop the water from going off. Many people add some brandy or other strong spirit to a mixed bottle, especially if the bottle will not be kept cool - if, say, they intend to carry it about in their pocket all the time. A teaspoon of brandy - about 5mls - is enough.

Other 'non-alcoholic' ways of keeping the contents fresh include keeping the bottle in a fridge, or adding a teaspoon of cider vinegar or vegetable glycerine.

When does one stop taking the remedies?

When the problem that is being treated has gone. There is no need to continue taking them in case it comes back and of course no need to wean oneself off the remedies gradually, as you have to do with drugs like steroids and beta-blockers. Nor do you need to take a complete course of doses over a specific number of days, as you do with antibiotics.

If things get worse once you start taking remedies, should you stop taking them or continue?

The remedies do not cause side-effects or aggravations, but it may be that they are stirring up repressed feelings that need to be cleansed before complete healing can be achieved. If you feel this is the case then you can look to see if there is a need for any other remedies instead of or as well as the ones you are currently taking.

Because the remedies have positive effects there is no need to stop taking them. Even if you are taking the wrong ones this only means that they will not improve things - they will never make them worse.

Is it always better to select as few remedies as possible?

The normal guideline is to try to use no more than six or seven at a time, since experience has shown that more than this number is not usually necessary if a little thought goes into the selection process. Taking more remedies than are actually needed means that the focus is lost, and the ones that are necessary will not work as well or quickly as they might otherwise have done.

However, it is not true that three remedies are always better than four, or that the ideal selection is a single remedy: if six (or eight, or even nine) remedies really are necessary, that is how many you should take.

Are there any combinations of remedies that should never be used?

No. Even remedies that might appear to be direct opposites (Vervain and Wild Rose, for example, or Vine and Centaury) may occasionally be needed at once by the same person. It all depends on the personality and current emotional states of the person being treated.

Is it safe to take the remedies if you are a recovering alcoholic, given the brandy content?

If remedies are diluted into a dropper bottle and taken four drops at a time in the usual way the amount of alcohol taken is very small.

Nevertheless, taking even a minute quantity of alcohol may have a psychological impact on someone who has decided to give up completely. In addition there is a very powerful drug (known as Antabuse) which can cause a violent reaction in someone drinking even a tiny quantity of alcohol. For these reasons it is best in these circumstances to consult your qualified medical practitioner before taking the remedies.

When you do so you might explain the dilution process and mention that if the remedies are dropped into a hot drink most or all of the alcohol will evaporate, and it is of course possible to administer the remedies externally by rubbing them on the pulse points.

But if in doubt, ask your alcohol advisor.

Are the remedies affected if they are stored near aromatherapy oils?

No. The brandy used to preserve the remedies may be affected and may taste a little strange, but the action of the remedies is not affected in any way.

Are the remedies adversely affected by going through x-ray machines, barcode readers and so on?

No. This is a common misunderstanding and is caused by people assuming that Bach remedies are as delicate as homoeopathic remedies. In fact they are very robust.

The remedies aren't affected by x-ray machines at airports, barcode readers or radiation from screens. You can keep them by the television or take them through security scans without fear. And there's no problem keeping them in the fridge. The only things to avoid are heat and direct sunlight - both of which can make the brandy preservative go stale.

Why not mix all the remedies together and have a single mix for every problem?

Someone suggested this to Dr Bach, and he tried it but found that it didn't work. The simplest and most direct path was the one he recommended - in other words, selection of accurate remedies according to the personality and emotional state.

Why is it four drops of the crisis formula and two drops of everything else?

The crisis combination is a composite remedy and contains a smaller amount of each individual mother tincture than a single stock bottle does. So in order to get the right amount of remedy the dose is doubled.

Why is it two drops in mixing bottles and in a glass of water - surely the person taking the glass of water will get more remedy?

This is true, but the amount of remedy is not important as long as the minimum dose is taken. The minimum dose is the amount you get if you take four drops from a mixing bottle.

When putting the remedies in a glass of water, then, you are probably taking more than you need, but it gives you a margin for error. You can sip from the glass without worrying about how big the glass is or how much water is in it or how much of the water you have drunk, because even one sip from the largest glass will give you the minimum dose.

Is there an easy way to remember how many drops to use at a time?

You always use two drops at a time from a single remedy stock bottle, whether you are putting it in your mouth or in a glass or in a mixing bottle.

You always use four drops at a time from a mixed bottle, whether it is a pre-mixed crisis formula from the shop or a personal selection that you have mixed into a bottle yourself.

Simple!

How can I get hold of remedies?

It is possible to order the individual remedies online and a BFRP/BFRAP can put together and give to you or send you personal mixes ready to take.

How can I tell which remedies use mother tinctures made under Bach Centre supervision?

Look for Dr Bach's signature on the label.

Why do the remedies have a use-by date now? Should they be discarded after this date?

By law the stock bottles have to carry a use-by date. The five year period relates to the shelf life of brandy stored in a rubber-topped bottle.

The remedies themselves will keep their properties indefinitely (although the brandy may begin to taste a little strange after the five year period).

What are the sun and boiling methods?

The sun method involves floating flowerheads in a clear glass bowl filled with natural spring water. This is left in bright sunlight for three hours, then the flowerheads are removed and the energised water is mixed half and half with brandy.

The boiling method involves putting flowering twigs into a pan of spring water and boiling them for half an hour. The pan is then left to cool, the plant matter removed, and again the water is mixed half and half with brandy.

In both cases the resulting mix is known as mother tincture. This is diluted at the rate of two drops per 30mls of brandy to make the stock bottles sold in the shops.