

A CASE OF HAND, FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

Like many people, I have heard of a disease called hoof and mouth disease and mostly I had heard about it in the context of farm animals, most notably sheep and cattle. So you can imagine my surprise and alarm when I received a phone call from a woman whose 27-month-old daughter had been, she informed me, “exposed to the hoof and mouth virus”! I made a mental note to myself to be sure and check the web for information after receiving the toddler’s symptoms.

The mother’s main concern was that her daughter was having a great deal of difficulty nursing as her mouth had very painful sores on the inside. Nursing would usually be of great comfort to the little girl when sick but because of the sores in the mouth, it was too painful even to latch on to the mother’s breast. The illness began as a slight cough with a runny nose. Then she developed a rash on her feet, knees and bum. There were blisters on the inside of her lower lip and the left side of her inner cheek as well as on the palms and backs of her hands.

To offer some relief, the mom had made some oatmeal broth for her to drink and had given her an herbal immune tonic. In addition, she had purchased a homeopathic combination remedy for fever blisters. (A combination homeopathic remedy is a formula that contains more than one homeopathic remedy in low potency). In this case the 4 remedies combined were Borax 2X, Antimonium crud 3X, Baptisia 3X and Natrum mur 3X...all of these remedies have an affinity for skin problems, especially fever blisters.) When asked if there was any relief with the combination remedy, she said yes but only for about ½ hour and then no change.

I then asked the mom to describe the blisters to me. The ones in the mouth were raised. “They look white and have a little bit of liquid in them. They are larger than the size of a pin head...the kind of pin with the round ball on the end...that size.” And the ones on the hands she described as being more regular (not the ball at the end size) pinhead sized and red...”more like a scattering rash.” There was a slight fever that seemed to come and go. The runny nose was a clear, watery liquid and she was drooling quite a bit from her mouth. She also described the “little bit of liquid” in the blisters as being clear as well although that was difficult to see as those blisters were inside the mouth.

I often like to ask about children’s appetites when they are sick as they can often be a clue to a remedy choice. “Today she has been asking for apples...she likes to eat a

LOT of apples.” Mom also mentioned that she will drink vitamin c willingly. With the sores in her mouth however, many things would “burn”. Other than that, there was nothing out of the ordinary in her eating patterns.

Sometimes when children are sick, they are not their “usual” selves” so I enquired as to how her nature had been while sick. “Very challenging...she’d be fine and then scream and cry...she doesn’t want anything to do with me. When her father left for work, she cried. She pushes everything away including what her dad gives her. She’s cuddling more today.” When I asked what was most challenging, she replied that “she is less independent and all she wants to do is watch DVD’s all day.”

Immediately after the phone call I checked the website of the Centre for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/enterovirus/hfhf.htm>. I wanted to be very clear about what this disease was and was not. Could this be hoof and mouth disease or was it something else?

My first question was answered very quickly and I was relieved to hear that the hoof and mouth disease of cattle and sheep had nothing whatsoever to do with this “common illness of infants and children” called hand, foot and mouth disease; different diseases caused by different viruses. You would think for the sanity of parents, two different names could have been thought of that didn’t sound quite so similar!

Here is the description of the disease:

Hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD) is a common illness of infants and children. It is characterized by fever, sores in the mouth, and a rash with blisters. HFMD begins with a mild fever, poor appetite, malaise ("feeling sick"), and frequently a sore throat. One or 2 days after the fever begins, sores develop in the mouth. They begin as small red spots that blister and then often become ulcers. They are usually located on the tongue, gums, and inside of the cheeks. The skin rash develops over 1 to 2 days with flat or raised red spots, some with blisters. The rash does not itch, and it is usually located on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It may also appear on the buttocks. A person with HFMD may have only the rash or the mouth ulcers.

The description sounds pretty much like what was described to me! So the task at hand then, as a homeopath, was to figure out which remedy would be best for this toddler. With homeopathy, we do not treat the disease so much as the individual who has the disease so we look for the symptoms that not only cover the disease (common) but those symptoms that are individual and unique. In that way, we can be surer of successfully aiding the body’s own vitality to heal itself of the disease. That is why it is important to ascertain symptoms such as food desires and aversions, thirst and changes in personality during illness; it is an excellent way to individualize a remedy. Two children could have exactly the same symptoms as described above, but could need two different remedies depending on their natures and desires and aversions.

One of the most unusual aspects in this toddler's case was her desire for apples and willingness to drink Vitamin C despite its' acidity and the sores in her mouth! Also significant was her marked change in behavior...from an independent little girl to "challenging"...nothing seemed to please her except watching DVD's.

I used the following rubrics to see what remedies might appear:

Mind; HOLDING or being held; desire for

Generalities; FOOD and drinks; apples; desires

Mouth; ERUPTIONS; general; pustules

Mouth; APHTHAE; lips, internal

The remedy that came shining through was Antimonium tartaricum. (Remember the combination remedy? It had Antimonium crudum in the formula...a similar remedy but not quite the same.)

Antimonium tart is a remedy that is most known for its loud, rattling cough with difficulty expectorating loose phlegm. It sounds as if the child should be able to get the mucous up but it is very difficult to do so. It also has pustular/vesicular eruptions and hence is often used as a remedy in chicken pox when the symptoms fit. One of its peculiar characteristics is the desire for apples and sour or juicy foods. It is also one of the children's remedies known for its contrariness and capriciousness. Remember the mother saying that she "pushes everything away including what her dad gives her..."doesn't want anything to do with me"...wants to cuddle more"...so wanting to be held and then not wanting anything to do with the mother are all very much symptoms that you would find in Antimonium tart.

Everything is a burden. The child when sick doesn't want to be touched or talked to or looked at. Wants to be let alone. The infant is always keeping up a pitiful whining and moaning. Kent's Lectures

Child clings to those around; wants to be carried; cries and whines if anyone touches it; will not let you feel the pulse. Craves apples, fruits, acids, cold drinks, refreshing things. Tyler's Drug Pictures

I prescribed Antimonium tart in a 30CH potency, 2 granules to be given hourly for 3 times.

Although I normally expect parents to book a follow-up appointment, I decided to call her as I was very curious as to how the toddler responded to the remedy. This was my first case of HFMD and although the references assure me that it is a common childhood illness, I had never heard of it before! The mother said that the first change she noticed was in her daughter's mood..."it had changed remarkably. Up until the remedy, she had seemed disconnected and frustrated and within minutes of taking the

first dose, she put her head down on my breast and fell asleep. Within 3 hours, she was nursing again, something that she hadn't been able to do for awhile." When I spoke with her a couple of days after that, she told me that the rash was gone and that she was definitely better but she had a very loose rattle-y cough but nothing was coming up and that this was in fact, how the whole illness had begun! I advised her at this point, to repeat the Antimonium tart in the same way as before and to please phone me to let me know how things work out. I expect to hear from her in a couple of days as she is planning to book an appointment for a full consult for her daughter because now she knows that homeopathy really makes a difference.