



The Woof-Meow Show

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The “Woof-Meow” show is on every Sunday at 8:30PM on WVOM, 103.9FM, the Voice of Maine. Hosted by Don Hanson of Green Acres Kennel Shop, the show focuses on educating dog and cat guardians about their dogs and cats.

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GUEST: Don Hanson & Kate Dutra

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BACH FLOWER ESSENCES

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Like many people, I was initially very skeptical of complementary and alternative medicine and treatments such as Bach Flower Essences. Having an engineering/science background, I found it difficult to deal with the concept that complementary medicine could not always be explained by science. It wasn't until one day when I had one of those “a-ha!” moments that I discovered they might be a subject worthy of further study. My moment began with a client who had a dog with mild separation anxiety. Our discussion revealed 1) the dog was mildly destructive when left home alone; 2) the clients were concerned about the dogs emotional state but not what was being destroyed; 3) they were uncomfortable with the idea of using any drugs such as Clomicalm but were open to natural remedies; and 4) in my opinion the couple was unlikely to have the time or motivation to follow my standard behavior modification protocol. They were very busy and the problem was just not severe enough to cause them to take action.

I wanted to help these people and their dog, but was uncertain how to proceed. Based upon their comments it was obvious that my normal treatment plan, Clomicalm from their veterinarian and a behavior modification protocol, was not going to be acceptable. I asked if they had heard of Bach Rescue Remedy[®]. I explained that I had limited knowledge of flower essences, but that I had been looking for a natural, anti-anxiety treatment for one of our dogs, and had done a little research on this product and had heard of many people who had great success using Rescue Remedy[®]. I provided them with dosage guidelines, and sent them to the local health food store to buy a bottle (since this was before we sold the Bach Flower Essences at our store). Approximately one week later my clients called and told me that after giving the dog Rescue Remedy[®] for a week, all separation problems had resolved! The clients indicated that they had made no changes in their routine, were not treating the dog with anything other than the Rescue Remedy[®] and had done no behavior modification. They reported that their dog was no longer showing any signs of stress when left alone and all destructive behavior had ceased. While this is only anecdotal evidence, it was enough to convince me that I needed to learn more about Bach Flower Essences.

Most of the information I will be presenting in this article is based upon anecdotal evidence. Because it is not based upon statistical research and the scientific method, anecdotal evidence is often dismissed by the scientific

community, yet the following is a prime example of the role and importance that it plays. As early as the 1700's, sailors were fed limes as a way of preventing scurvy. This practice was based strictly on anecdotal evidence. It wasn't until 1932 and the discovery of vitamin C that the scientific method was able to prove why limes and other citrus fruits helped prevent and cure scurvy. Fortunately, no one stopped sailors from eating limes because scientists had not completed a study demonstrating that eating limes cures scurvy. Anecdotal evidence is often the first step in the discovery of new methods and ways of thinking.

Bach Flower Essences fall into the realm of complementary and alternative medicine along with Chinese medicine and acupuncture, herbal medicine, aromatherapy, homeopathy, and others. You will not find vast numbers of studies scientifically and statistically proving these modalities work, yet much of the world's population, including many scientifically trained physicians and veterinarians, use these modalities with great success on a daily basis. While my engineering background initially caused me to be very close-minded about complementary medicine, I have seen first hand, with myself, pets, friends, family and clients, how complementary modalities do heal.

A few studies have been published on the use of Bach Flower Essences with people. These studies concluded that they were effective in treating clinically depressed patients¹, safe and effective when used with children for a variety of disorders², and effective at reducing stress^{3,4}.

What Are the Bach Flower Essences

The Bach Flower Essences are all natural, very dilute solutions made from spring water, an alcohol preservative, and the parts of specific flowers. They are used to help balance the emotions and bring about a state of equilibrium in living organisms, and have been successfully used with people, animals, and even plants. Bach Flower Essences are listed in the Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia of the United States (HPUS), have been issued with National Drug Code (NDC) numbers by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are sold as over-the-counter homeopathic products in the United States.

Although the Bach Flower Essences are listed in the HPUS and are prepared at a 5X homeopathic dilution (0.00001 gram of active substance per milliliter of tincture) they are not considered homeopathic medicine. While they are prepared from plant material, they do not fall in the same category as herbal medicine. The fact that we refer to them as “essences” suggests to some that they are aromatherapy—the use of essential oils and other aromatic compounds from plants to affect someone's mood or health—which they are not. Flower essences fill their own unique niche in the arsenal of complementary medicine. Like homeopathy, Chinese medicine and acupuncture and Reiki, the Bach Flower Essences work at an energetic level in the body. This class of complementary therapies is usually called vibrational medicine. In his book, *A Practical Guide to Vibrational Medicine*, Dr Richard Gerber, a physician, describes vibrational medicine and the Bach Flower Essences thusly:

“Vibrational medicine is based upon modern scientific insights into the energetic nature of the atoms and molecules making up our bodies, combined with ancient mystical observations of the body's unique life-energy systems that are critical but less well understood aspects of human functioning. Bach believed that his flower remedies would not only neutralize negative emotional—and mental—energy patterns but also infuse positive vibrations associated with specific virtues into an individual such as the virtues of love, peace, steadfastness, gentleness, strength, understanding, tolerance, wisdom, forgiveness, courage or joy.”

The Chinese call this energy Qi, homeopaths call it vital force, and Dr. Bach called it “positive vibrations.” While we cannot currently use scientific instruments to measure any of these forms of energy, many believe in their healing ability. There are many entrenched in the world of orthodox, traditional medicine who would say it is unwise to use a method of healing when we do not completely understand how it works. This is why there has

been resistance to complementary medicine by many modern scientists. Yet, our knowledge of many medicines accepted by the traditionalists is equally sketchy. Aspirin, found in most household medicine cabinets, has been commercially available since 1899, yet scientists only began to understand how aspirin worked in the 1970's. Buspirone (Buspar) is a commonly prescribed drug for certain anxiety disorders. The National Institutes of Health MedlinePlus database (www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/uspidi/202100.html) contains the following citations for Buspirone:

“Buspirone is used to treat certain anxiety disorders or to relieve the symptoms of anxiety.”
“It is not known exactly how Buspirone works to relieve the symptoms of anxiety.”

Considering that Bach Flower Essences can also be used to treat anxiety and do not have the side effects of Buspirone, I believe consideration of the Bach Flower Essences would be a smart choice.

There are a total of 38 different Bach Flower Essences, 37 made from specific flowers and one made from the water of a spring believed to have healing properties. Each essence is used to treat a specific emotion or state of mind such as fear, anger, apathy, etc. These are all emotions that most people can readily identify in themselves and in other people, and with training can also identify in animals. These emotional states and their corresponding essence are all described in *The Twelve Healers and Other Remedies* by Edward Bach, MB, BS, MRCS, LRCP, DPH. Dr. Bach's goal was to create a system of medicine that was simple enough that people who become familiar with the essences through his publications could identify their negative emotional state, select the corresponding essence and thus treat themselves.

The Bach Flower Essences may be used individually or in combination. Rescue Remedy[®] is the only combination remedy prepared and sold ready-made; it contains five essences and is typically only used for emergencies or extremely stressful situations when the subject is in a state of mental or physical shock, terror, or panic. It should not be used as a replacement for veterinary care, but it is often used as a complement to traditional treatments. I know of many people who use Rescue Remedy[®] to calm themselves before trips to the dentist and who also use it with their pets before trips to the veterinarian. I always carry a bottle in my briefcase and car, so it is available in case of an emergency or accident.

The Bach Flower Essences are very safe. The only contra-indication is hypersensitivity to any of the ingredients. Since the botanical component is so dilute, a reaction is very unlikely. Grape alcohol is used as a preservative, so the essences may be unsuitable for those sensitive to alcohol.

Bach Flower Essence are not used to treat physical disease, but rather the emotional state of the patient. They can be used to help resolve fear and anxiety, anger, grief, and many other emotions. Common sense and numerous research studies⁵ have shown how stress can have a negative impact on the immune system. Anything that we do to reduce or relieve stress, including use of Bach Flower Essences, has the potential to positively affect our immune system and thus aid in maintaining physical health.

History of the Bach Flower Essences

The Bach Flower Essences were discovered by Dr. Edward Bach, a Welsh physician practicing medicine in the early 1900's. Trained in conventional allopathic medicine, Dr. Bach observed that his patients' recovery seemed to have as much to do with their emotional health as it did with any physical condition. Those in a positive emotional state recovered quicker.

Dr. Bach's area of expertise was bacteriology, but as he became more intrigued with the emotions of his patients, he started to study the work of Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathic medicine. Homeopathic medicine emphasizes treating the “whole” patient including their emotions and mental state, rather than focusing exclusively on physical symptoms. As a result of his research, Dr. Bach developed seven

nosodes to treat intestinal disease. A nosode is a homeopathic remedy made from a pathological specimen. The Bach nosodes are made from bacteria found in the bowels. As Dr. Bach began to use the nosodes with his patients (which are still in use today) he observed that he could select the appropriate curative nosode for his patients based solely on their emotional state⁶.

While Dr. Bach was very satisfied with the positive effects of homeopathy, he was concerned that many of the typical homeopathic remedies were made from toxic substances (bacteria, Belladonna, Mercury, Arsenic, etc.). He was convinced that if he were to devote his efforts to searching among the wonders of the natural world, he would find non-toxic medicines that would have a similar effect. In 1930 Dr. Bach left an extremely lucrative private practice in London and started on his quest to find what would become known as the Bach Flower Essences. During the next six years he would discover and successfully use the same 38 essences that we use today.

My Journey with the Bach Flower Essences®

After my “a-ha!” experience I enrolled in the Dr. Edward Bach Foundation’s practitioner training program. (www.bachfloweressences.co.uk/dynamic/us/index.php?section=training) The foundation offers two training tracks; one for those who wish to use the essences with people and one for those who wish to use them with animals. You must complete the first two levels of the human track before applying for the animal program. My level one and two human classes each involved two days of study in Boston, MA. These classes provided an in-depth review of each of the 38 essences and their use. The level two class also included case studies and an overview of counseling techniques.

I completed my animal training at the Natural Animal Centre in the United Kingdom, the only place where the animal courses are currently offered. This training involved a two -day, three-day, and four-day class and readings to complete at home in between sessions. (www.bachcentre.com/found/animal.htm) The classes covered the essences as well as animal behavior and emotions, and counseling techniques. While we focused on canine, feline, and equine behavior we also studied turtles, rabbits, pigs, and other species. At the conclusion of the classes there is both an oral and written exam. Upon passing the exam, I had to successfully complete a series of case studies and a field study, before qualifying as a Bach Foundation Registered Practitioner Animal Specialist.

Since completing my qualifications in December of 2003, I have been using the essences with almost all of my behavioral clients. I have found them especially useful in treating many of the fears and phobias seen in pets. If a client’s veterinarian has recommended a prescription drug, I advise the client to continue to use that drug in conjunction with the Bach Flower Essences. One of the nice things about the essences, is that they can be used with other treatments, including homeopathy, without interference.

The Evaluation Process

My standard behavioral evaluation asks clients to complete my behavioral and emotional questionnaires. This is followed by an interview at which we also observe and evaluate the pet. I almost always do evaluations with a colleague who assists, takes notes, and documents behaviors while I talk with the client. The Bach Foundation Code of Practice requires that I have a veterinary referral before recommending specific essences and that I actually observe the animal’s behavior. When working with clients that are unable to bring their pet to my office in Maine, I review video of the pet’s behavior and work with the client and their local veterinarian or behavior specialist.

At the conclusion of the consultation I provide the client with a behavior modification protocol as well as a combination of essences for their pet’s specific emotional profile. I usually use both behavior modification and Bach Flower Essences because it has been my experience that the use of the essences can shorten the amount of

time for a given behavior modification protocol. One of the biggest problems with behavior modification is getting the pet's guardian to comply with the protocol. If the essences shorten the amount of time required it's a win-win for the guardian and the pet. In these cases I cannot prove the essences helped resolve the issue; however, I have also treated some cases only with essences and have seen dramatic results.

I continue to have “a-ha!” moments with the essences. For example, last year I was treating a dog with severe resource guarding issues, some of the worst I have ever seen. Seven days after treatment with the essences, and prior to beginning any behavior modification, the client sent me an e-mail noting “profound changes” in the dog's behavior. I had them continue with the essences and behavior modification due to the severity of previous incidents, but the dog has never again exhibited any guarding behavior and has become more engaged with her guardians. The behavior modification protocol we used involved safely identifying the items that were considered valued resources, managing the environment to prevent uncontrolled access to those items, and gradual desensitization to the loss of those items. While there is no scientific evidence to demonstrate that the Bach Flower Essences caused this dramatic change in this dog's behavior, if I look at the dog's behavior, the essences selected, and the short time in which the change occurred, I believe it makes a very strong anecdotal case for the use of Bach Flower essences.

I do not have a set of standard combinations of essences used for specific problems (e.g. separation anxiety, resource guarding, show dog formula, etc.) as each pet must be evaluated as an individual. Two dogs, each with separation anxiety, may be treated with entirely different combinations of essences. I remain in contact with the client and meet with them as the situation requires. At times I treat both pet and guardian, as often the pet is feeding off the guardian's emotions. In almost all cases, the problem is treated as a chronic problem rather than an acute issue or passing mood. For chronic behavior problems, essences should be administered at least four times per day^{7,8}.

The Bach Flower Essences are not the proverbial “magic bullet.” While the two cases I have summarized showed dramatic improvement within a week, treatment typically takes longer. Depending on the issue being treated, the length of time the problem has existed, and the clients compliance, issues may start to resolve in anywhere from two weeks to a year. I have found the essences typically help to accelerate the behavior modification process and therefore help improve client compliance. If clients start to see results, they are more likely to continue with the behavior modification protocol and the administration of recommended essences.

Tips on Using Rescue Remedy®

Bach Rescue Remedy®, the most well known of the Bach Flower Essences, is a combination flower essences formula created specifically for addressing stress in emergency or crisis situations. The essences used in this formula help with trauma and shock (Star of Bethlehem), terror and panic (Rock Rose), hysteria or loss of control (Cherry Plum), impatience and agitation (Impatiens), and faintness and stunned feelings (Clematis). It is usually only used for acute or emergency situations, but can be used for treating chronic conditions, when appropriate. It can help after an accident or in any situation that causes extreme anxiety, nervousness or terror. Rescue Remedy® often has an immediate calming effect, and is safe, gentle, and non-toxic. It may be taken as often as needed without fear of overdosing.

Rescue Remedy® is not, however, a magic, instantaneous solution for long standing behavioral problems. While it can be helpful in reducing the stress and anxiety of a timid animal, it will not make them into a gregarious, “gotta love everybody” dog. Nor will Rescue Remedy® remove your pet's natural instincts, although it can help your pet to adapt those instincts to its environment.

When dealing with sudden behavior changes, you should arrange for a complete medical evaluation by your veterinarian to rule out any physical or medical reasons for the behavior change before trying Rescue Remedy® or any of the other Bach Flower Essences

How to treat your pet with Rescue Remedy®

Rescue Remedy® is usually administered by mouth, diluted in spring water. A little goes a long way, because it is not necessary to use it directly from the stock bottle you purchase. If you wish, when you purchase a stock bottle, you may also buy an empty 30 ml eyedropper bottle to be your treatment bottle. To prepare the treatment bottle for use with your pet, do the following:

1. Fill the treatment bottle ¼ full with vegetable glycerin, brandy, or vodka to act as a preservative. If you chose not to use a preservative, you must refrigerate the treatment bottle.
2. Fill the remainder of the bottle with spring water (do not use tap water). Dr. Bach specified spring water because he felt it was natural, unlike tap water which can be loaded with chemicals.
3. Put four drops of Bach Rescue Remedy® in the treatment bottle. You will treat your pet from this bottle.

Treating for an Acute Condition or Emergency

An acute situation might be a visit to the veterinarian or groomer, a thunderstorm, a dog fight, or a seizure. It is something that happens suddenly and rapidly affects your pet's emotional state.

Place four drops of the mixture from the treatment bottle on your pet's gums or tongue or on a treat or small piece of bread. Alternatively, you may apply the mixture to the paw pads, nose, belly, or ears. The remedy will be quickly absorbed from these areas.

If you see no improvement in 20 minutes, administer an additional four drops.

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