Roy / Lage-Roy
Radioactivity

Reading excerpt

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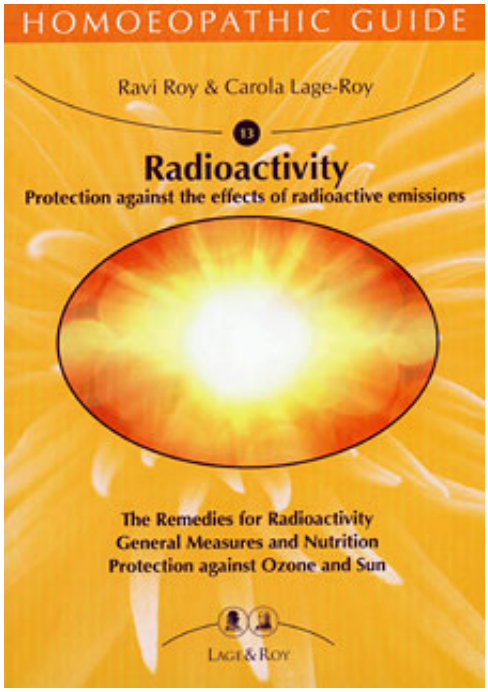

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1.5 The poison cloud of Chernobyl

Scientists of the University of Mainz have analysed the composition of the radioactive cloud that moved across the Federal Republic of Germany after the nuclear accident in Chernobyl by measuring the air's constituents.

Quantity	Isotope	Half-life
32%	Tellurium 132	3 days
31%	Iodine 131	8 days
9%	Ruthenium 103	39 years
7%	Ruthenium 106	1 year
6%	Caesium 137	30 years
5%	Caesium 134	2 years

1.6 The effects of radioactive elements on humans and animals

Iodine 131

Beta and gamma rays accumulate in the thyroid gland. In children especially, this gland can be destroyed or they can lead to cancer even decades later. They limit mental and physical growth and can lead to mental instability, expressing itself in an alternation of aggression and depression. Children are additionally endangered because of the high proportion of iodine, plutonium and strontium in milk, one of their staple foods.

Until the 3rd month of pregnancy, there is a natural barrier for the foetus against poisons from the mother; after that time, the thyroid gland in the embryo is affected 30 times more than that of the mother.

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Iodine 129

This iodine isotope is a product of nuclear fission and it plays a decisive role in atomic energy. It has a long half-life that leads to a saturation of the environment and to a strong destructive impact on the thyroid gland.

Tellurium 132

When Te 132 disintegrates, Iodine 132 is formed which disintegrates within 2.3 hours (its half-life). It was the radio nuclide with the shortest half-life and the highest concentration in the radioactive cloud at Chernobyl.

Plutonium 129

Pu 129 is Plutonium and makes up the largest part of the plutonium isotopes. It is a by-product of nuclear fission and disintegrates with a half-life of 24,100 years while emitting alpha particles in the process. The 420 aboveground nuclear tests have contributed to the world wide spreading of this highly toxic element. However, plutonium was only present in small quantities within the cloud from Chernobyl. It is inhaled in the form of very fine particles and settles in the lungs and in the lymphatic glands. It gets into the bones (biological half-life 100 years) and into the liver (biological half-life 40 years) via blood circulation.

Strontium 90

Beta and gamma radiation. Strontium 90 is a calcium analogue, i.e. it acts in a way which is similar to calcium. The organisms of mammals cannot differentiate between strontium and calcium. Strontium gets picked up and incorporated into the bones just as calcium does. Once there, it destroys the red bone marrow, which is the production factory for the blood corpuscles. It also gets incorporated into the lungs and the intestines. When white blood cells get irradiated by strontium 90, they divide uncontrollably. Calcium is an important part of milk. If a lactating woman ingests the strontium-contaminated milk or vegetables that

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have been exposed to radiation, her own milk will contain strontium molecules instead of calcium molecules.

Dangers: Leukaemia, osteoporosis, and bone cancer, especially in children. Babies and infants are particularly endangered, as their bodies are growing rapidly. The following basic rule applies: the faster the cell growth, the more susceptible the cells are to damage by radioactivity and high-frequency electro-magnetic radiation. The effect of radioactivity can be up to 32 times stronger in the embryo compared to an adult.

Due to the innumerable atomic tests in the past, we all have strontium in our bones. Children born in 1957/58 were very strongly affected, because there were a lot of nuclear tests being carried out above ground at that time, as was made public only in the eighties.

Caesium 137

Beta and gamma radiation. Caesium is very similar to Potash (Kali carbonicum). Plants love to pick it up, and we can expect that in the long run there will be traces of it in our system. Caesium deposits in muscles, liver and spleen. It leads to muscle shrinking and to shrinkage of collagen and therefore oedema and premature aging, or to a disintegration of the myelin of the nerves with a decline in reaction time. Due to its long half-life, it loses its harmful effect only after 300 years.

Plutonium 103 and 106

It collects in the lungs.

Ruthenium 103 and 106

also collect in the lungs. It is similar to iron and the body absorbs it easily in place of iron.

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1.7 Factors that influence the degree of radiation on the body

The degree of radiation on humans and animals depend on the following physical and biological factors:

- **On the dose received** (energy dose measured in Gray).
- **On the nature of the radiation** (especially destructive are neutrons and alpha particles).
- **On the distribution of the radiation dose over a certain time span.** The degree of the radiation damage depends on whether a living being has been exposed to radioactivity for a short time or cumulatively; what matters above all is the sum of absorbed radio activity. However, there is the chance for many cells to recover or even to be replaced by new cells if the radiation occurrence spread out over a longer time period.
- **On the distribution of radiation in the body.** The greater the vol ume of the radiation-affected organ or tissue, the greater the propor tional quantity of damaged cells - provided the dose is the same.
- **On the timing of the radiation.** The greatest damage on cells through radiation occurs during cell division. That is why the faster a cell reproduces, the less resistant it is; for instance the organs pro ducing blood (red bone marrow, lymphatic tissue), the mucous lin ing of stomach and small intestine, the skin, the reproductive glands, the embryonic cells and the growth plates in children and youths.

  If the whole body has been irradiated, the consequences are worse than if radiation only affected some body parts, especially those that are not so important for the functioning of the whole organism.
- **On the age and the general state of health.** People particularly at risk of suffering radiation damage are babies, children, young peo ple, women, pregnant women and people with a weak constitution.

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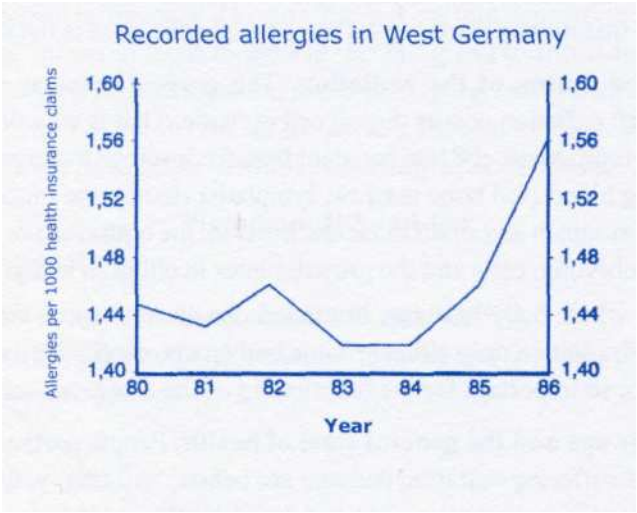
1.8 Symptoms after weak radiation

When talking about the damages inflicted by radioactivity or showing figures on maximum radiation permitted, we always have extreme situations in mind like cancer or death.

But what happens before that?

It is a too little known fact that any radioactive radiation influences the organism and can affect our well-being, which shows up in the most varied of symptoms:

- conjunctivitis, burning of the eyes, headaches, bitter or metallic taste in the mouth
- sore throat, difficulty on swallowing, feeling of gagging, swelling of the lymph glands
- lack of appetite or insatiable hunger
- restless sleep, heavy dreams, unrefreshing sleep
- allergies, eczema, neurodermatitis



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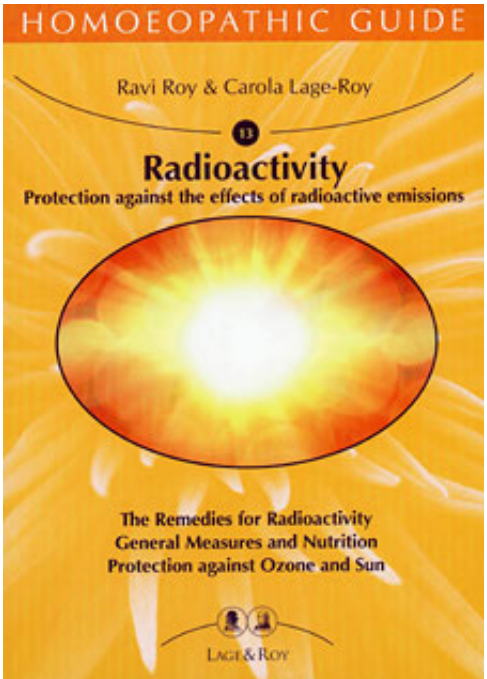

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