

## Naturopathy

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Naturopathy, or naturopathic medicine, is a system of medicine based on the healing power of nature. Naturopathy is a holistic system, meaning that naturopathic doctors (NDs) understand the patient as a totality of body, mind, and spirit. It is a system of healing, originating in Europe, that views disease as a manifestation of alterations in the processes by which the body naturally heals itself. It emphasizes health restoration as well as disease treatment. The term "naturopathy" literally translates as "nature disease."

Benjamin Lust, a German immigrant, first introduced naturopathy to the United States in 1902 when he founded the American School of Naturopathy. The school emphasized the use of natural cures, proper bowel habits, and good hygiene as the essential tools for health. This was the first time that dietary principles, such as increasing fiber intake and minimizing saturated fats, became popular.

From the mid-1920s through 1940, while allopathic medical training, pharmaceuticals and medical technologies gained notoriety, the use of naturopathic medicine declined. It was not until the 1960s that naturopathic-style holistic medicine regained popularity.

Today, naturopathic physicians having graduated a nationally accredited naturopathic medical school, are licensed primary care providers. They offer information and advice on a variety of alternative and complementary therapies. Naturopathy is practiced throughout Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.

There are two areas of focus in naturopathy: one is supporting the body's own healing abilities, and the other is empowering individuals to make lifestyle changes necessary for the best possible health. While NDs treat both short bouts of illness and chronic conditions, their emphasis is on prevention of disease and patient education. Naturopathic doctors treat the whole person, which means they consider a variety of factors before they diagnose and treat an illness.

Factors an ND might consider in making a diagnosis include: mental, emotional, and spiritual state, diet, family history (whether or not your parents or grandparents suffer or suffered from the same condition), your environment, and your lifestyle.

Some of the more common treatments used by a naturopath include: nutritional counseling, herbal medicine, homeopathic medicine, acupuncture, and hydrotherapy (water therapy).

Therapies in the hydrotherapy category include drinking natural spring water, taking baths, and exercising in water, all of which are thought to stimulate, support healing and strengthen the immune system. The "physical medicine" approach to healing involves using touch, hot and

cold compresses, electric currents, and sound waves to manipulate the muscles, bones, and spine. Detoxification therapy removes toxins from the body by using techniques such as fasting, enemas, and drinking water in large amounts. Spirituality therapy involves personal spiritual development as an important part of an overall health program. Lifestyle and psychological counseling might include an ND using hypnosis, guided imagery, or other counseling methods as part of a treatment plan.

Naturopathic physicians can bridge disparate fields with their training in both conventional and non-conventional treatment. They are able to identify and prescribe appropriate treatment including referral to conventional medical doctors.

## **Patient's Guide:** **How do I use Naturopathic Medicine?**

A visit to a naturopathic doctor, or ND, will be similar to a visit to your family doctor. It's best to have a referral to an ND. Your first visit may take more than an hour. During this time, a very thorough history is taken. Next, the doctor will perform an appropriate physical examination, which may require laboratory tests. Naturopaths consider patients to be partners in their healthcare, so you may be asked to make lifestyle changes - such as changing your sleeping, eating, and exercise patterns.