



NATUROPATHY

What is naturopathy?

Naturopathy, or natural medicine, is a system of medicine that uses physical, psychological, and biochemical therapies to maintain health and treat illness. It has its roots in healing techniques popular in 18th and 19th century Europe. The term “naturopathy” was instituted in the early 1900s by a German emigrant, Benedict Lust, who brought the principles of the nature cure — fresh air, pure water, exercise, herbal remedies, and hydrotherapy — with him to the United States. He also used homeopathy, spinal manipulation, and massage. Naturopathic treatments and the approaches to health management grew in popularity and quickly spread across North America. In Ontario, doctors of naturopathy were first licenced in 1925, under the Drugless Practitioners Act. British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta also license naturopathic doctors.

The popularity of naturopathy declined after the Second World War and, by 1970, only one college of naturopathy remained in the United States. The increase of public interest in nutrition and the environment in the 1970s led many people to rediscover naturopathy. By 1978, the Ontario (now Canadian) College of Naturopathic Medicine opened in Toronto. After an intensive four-year program, students receive the degree of Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine (ND).

Principles of naturopathy

The practice of naturopathy is governed by the belief that the body has the ability to heal itself. Naturopathic treatments are aimed at

stimulating, strengthening, and improving the healing capability of the individual. The following principles guide the practice of naturopathy:

- Use the healing power of nature (in Latin, *vis medicatrix naturae*): The body can establish, maintain, and restore good health. The role of the naturopathic doctor (ND) is to support and enhance this ability, to identify and remove obstacles to good health, and to help maintain wellness.
- Identify and treat the causes of illness (*tolle causum*). The causes of disease must be identified and treated before the patient can recover from illness. Symptoms are seen as evidence of the body’s attempts to heal itself but they are not the causes of disease and should not be suppressed by treatment. Illness may be caused by physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual factors.
- First, do no harm (*primum no nocere*). Treatments must act together with the body’s own healing efforts, not against them. To treat only the symptoms and not the root cause of the illness can be harmful.
- Treat the whole person. Recovery from illness and maintenance of good health can only occur when all aspects of the individual are balanced and in harmony. In treating a patient, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, genetic, environmental, and social factors must be assessed.
- The physician is also a teacher (*docere*). Naturopathy emphasizes prevention of illness and maintenance of good health. The ND has an ethical role to play in educating



patients and encouraging them to take responsibility for their health. The emphasis is on the patient and ND working together as a team.

- Emphasize prevention. Through education and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, the ND stresses building health rather than fighting disease.

Diagnosis

Naturopathic doctors conduct detailed interviews with their patients. The first consultation often takes an hour or more. A full case history is developed, including the patient's current problem, diet, lifestyle, medical history, and medication. Often NDs will use blood tests or other conventional medical tests to assist in diagnosis and assessment.

Treatments

A wide variety of treatments are available through the seven main disciplines or therapeutic modalities used by NDs. Although NDs must study all of these disciplines, some may specialize in one or more of these disciplines.

- Oriental medicine (including diet and herbal medicines) and acupuncture.
- Botanical (plant-based) medicines.
- Homeopathic medicine.
- Naturopathic manipulation: using the hands to treat soft tissue, muscle, or bone conditions.
- Hydrotherapy: using hot and cold water to stimulate circulation and the immune system.
- Clinical nutrition: emphasizing the relationship between diet and disease; may include a change of diet, with occasional fasting, and supplementation as required.
- Lifestyle counselling and prevention.

Naturopathy and HIV/AIDS

With its emphasis on preventing illness and supporting the body's ability to heal, naturopathy may help to strengthen the immune system. The guiding principle "first do no harm" allows naturopathic treatments to be flexible

and adapted to the individual. Although occasional fasting, for example, may be encouraged for many patients, it would not be prescribed for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Finding a naturopathic practitioner

Licensed or registered NDs undertake a rigorous training program. They must complete three years of pre-med courses at university before entering a four-year program at a recognized school of naturopathy, such as the Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine in Toronto. NDs are provincially licensed in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. For help in finding a naturopathic doctor in your area, contact

The Canadian Naturopathic Association
1255 Sheppard Avenue East
Toronto, ON M2K 1E2
1-800-551-4381

Cost

The first consultation with an ND may take up to 90 minutes and the cost may range from \$90 to \$240. Return visits may take 20 to 45 minutes and cost \$45 to \$135. Prices vary, and many NDs offer a sliding-fee scale dependent on a patient's ability to pay.

Credits

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Further reading

Much of the research in naturopathic medicine is published in German-language journals, which are not translated into English.

Cassileth BR. *The alternative medicine handbook*. New York: WW Norton and Company, 1998.

Chaitow L. Immune deficiency care. *International Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 1997;15(1):29-31.

Chaitow L. Naturopathic strategies for immune deficiency. *International Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 1997;15(2):29-32.



Pizzorno J, Murray M. *Textbook of Naturopathic Medicine*. Bothwell, WA: Bastyr University Press, 1990.

The following journals often publish articles related to naturopathy and natural medicine:

The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Therapies

The Journal of Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine

The Journal of Integrative Medicine

The Alternative Medicine Review

The Journal of Naturopathic Medicine

Disclaimer

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatments in question.

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