

NATURAL HEALTH SERVICES

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What Is Naturopathic Medicine?

By Keith Post, ND

Naturopathic Physicians:

A naturopathic physician has completed a Doctorate of Naturopathic Medicine (ND) degree from a four-year graduate level naturopathic medical college with admission requirements comparable to those of conventional medical schools. In addition to the standard medical curriculum, naturopathic students must do extensive coursework and clinical study in natural therapeutics.

The Philosophy and Principles of Naturopathic Medicine:

Naturopathic medicine is a distinctively natural approach to health and healing that recognizes the integrity of the whole person. It is heir to the vitalistic tradition of medicine in the Western world, emphasizing the treatment of disease through the stimulation, enhancement, and support of the inherent healing capacity of the person. Methods of treatments are chosen which work with the patient's vital force, respecting the intelligence of the natural healing process. The practice of naturopathic medicine emerges from six underlying principles of healing, which are based on the objective observation of the nature of health and disease. It is these principles that distinguish naturopathic medicine from other medical approaches. They are:

The Healing Power of Nature (*vis medicatrix naturae*).

Nature acts powerfully through healing mechanisms in the body and mind to establish, maintain and restore health. The healing process is ordered and intelligent; nature heals through the response of the life force. The physician's role is to facilitate and augment this process, to act to identify and remove obstacles to health and recovery and to support the creation of a healthy internal and external environment.

Find the Cause (*tolle causam*).

Illness does not occur without prior cause. Underlying causes of disease must be discovered and removed or treated before a person can recover completely from illness. Symptoms are expressions of the body's attempt to heal, but are not the cause of disease. Causes may occur on many levels including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The physician must evaluate fundamental underlying causes on all levels, including dietary and lifestyle habits, and direct treatment at the root causes rather than solely at their symptomatic expression.

First, Do No Harm (*primum no nocere*).

Illness is a purposeful process of the organism. The process of healing includes the generation of symptoms that are, in fact, an expression of the life force attempting to heal itself. Therefore, therapeutic actions should be complimentary to and synergistic with this healing process.

Methods designed to suppress symptoms without removing underlying causes are considered harmful and are avoided or minimized. Non-invasive treatments that minimize the risk of harmful side effects are preferred.

Treat the Whole Person (*in perturbato animo sicut in corpore sanitas esse non potest*), i.e. the multifactorial nature of health and disease.

Health and disease are conditions of the whole organism, a whole involving a complex interaction of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, genetic, dietary, lifestyle, environmental, social and other factors. The physician must treat the whole person by considering all of these factors. The harmonious functioning of all aspects of the individual is essential to recovery from and prevention of disease, and requires a personalized and comprehensive approach to diagnosis and treatment.

The Physician as Teacher (*docere*).

Beyond an accurate diagnosis and appropriate prescription, the physician needs to create a healthy and sensitive relationship with the patient. A cooperative doctor/patient relationship has intrinsic therapeutic value. The physician's major role is to educate and encourage the patient to take responsibility for their own health. The physician acts as a catalyst for healthy change, empowering and motivating the patient to assume self-responsibility. It is the patient, not the doctor, who ultimately accomplishes healing. The physician must strive to inspire hope as well as understanding. The physician must also make a commitment to his/her personal and spiritual development in order to be a good teacher for others.

Preventive Medicine (*principiis obsta sero medicina curatur*), i.e. prevention is the best "cure".

The ultimate goal of any health care system should be prevention. This is accomplished through education and promotion of life habits that create good health. The physician assesses risk factors and hereditary susceptibility to disease and makes appropriate interventions to avoid further harm and risk to the patient. The emphasis is on building health rather than on fighting disease. The natural approach to health care can prevent minor illness from developing into more serious or chronic degenerative diseases, because patients are taught the principles with which to live a healthy life.

The Practice of Naturopathic Medicine:

Clinical Nutrition:

The therapeutic uses of food and nutritional supplements have always been a fundamental aspect of naturopathic medicine. A growing body of scientific knowledge validates the naturopathic approach to diet and nutrition. Many medical conditions can be treated effectively using foods, cleansing diets and nutritional supplements, with fewer of the complications and side effects inherent in other treatments. Furthermore, proper nutrition for the individual is the cornerstone of preventative medicine.

Homeopathic Medicine:

Homeopathic medicine, which originated in Germany over 200 years ago, is based on the principle of "like cures like." It works on a subtle yet powerful electromagnetic level, strengthening the body's healing and immune responses. Tiny amounts of potentized animal, plant and mineral are employed which stimulate the vital force in the direction of true healing. This is witnessed by the fact that symptoms often appear in reverse order, as if the patient were going back in time, although the severity is less.

Botanical Medicine:

Many plant substances are powerful medicines. Where chemically derived drugs often only address a single problem at a time, botanical medicines are able to address a variety of problems simultaneously. Also, their organic nature makes them more compatible with the body's own biochemistry; hence, they can be gently effective with fewer toxic side effects. Also, ongoing scientific research in Europe and Asia is demonstrating that some plant substances achieve results superior to pharmaceuticals in clinical situations.

Physical Medicine:

Naturopathic medicine has its own methods of therapeutic manipulation of muscles, joints and the spine. ND's also use physical therapy modalities, such as exercise, massage, ultrasound, diathermy, interferential, water, heat, cold and others.

Oriental Medicine:

Oriental medicine has a healing philosophy which is complimentary to naturopathic medicine. Meridian theory offers an important understanding of the unity of the body and mind, adding to the Western understanding of physiology. Acupuncture provides a method of treatment that can unify and harmonize the imbalances present in disease conditions which, if untreated, can result in illness.

Naturopathic Obstetrics:

Some naturopathic physicians are trained to deliver babies in both homebirth and hospital settings. Modern diagnostic techniques are used to help ensure a successful birth. Also, prenatal care is emphasized in order to strengthen the mother's body, so that complications associated with pregnancy may be prevented.

Psychological Medicine:

Mental attitudes and emotional states often influence, or even cause, physical illness. Counseling, stress management, hypnotherapy, biofeedback and other therapies are often used by N.D.'s as part of a total healing program.

Minor Surgery:

As general practitioners, some N.D.'s routinely perform in-office surgical procedures, including the repair of wounds and the removal of foreign bodies, cysts and other superficial masses.