

## Naturopathic Medicine - The Basics

Naturopathic Medicine is a unique and distinct system of health care that emphasizes the use of prevention and natural therapeutics. The doctors who practice naturopathic medicine, called *naturopathic physicians* (NDs), are trained to serve as primary care general practitioners who are experts in the prevention, diagnosis, management, and treatment of both acute and chronic health conditions.

Naturopathic physicians are trained at accredited, four-year, post-graduate, residential naturopathic medical programs. The training consists of comprehensive study of the conventional medical sciences, including anatomy, physiology, pathology, microbiology, immunology, clinical and physical diagnosis, laboratory diagnosis, cardiology, gastroenterology, gynecology, etc, as well as detailed study of a wide variety of natural therapies.

Naturopathic physicians are guided by six principles: ***First, Do No Harm; The Healing Power of Nature; Find the Cause; Treat the Whole Person; Preventive Medicine; and, Doctor as Teacher.*** This set of principles, outlines the philosophy guiding the naturopathic approach to health and healing and forms the foundation of this distinct health care practice.

Naturopathic physicians use a variety of natural and conventional approaches, including clinical nutrition, homeopathy, botanical medicine, hydrotherapy, physical medicine, counseling, minor surgery, prescription medicines. Naturopathic treatments are effective in treating a wide variety of conditions without the need for additional intervention.

In the United States, the naturopathic medical profession's infrastructure includes accredited educational institutions, professional licensing, national standards of practice, peer review, and a commitment to state-of-the-art scientific research.

## Historical Perspective

Naturopathic medicine in the United States came into existence just over 100 years ago, developed by a man named Benedict Lust in New York state. While the profession by name is just a century old, the natural therapies and philosophy on which naturopathic medicine are based have been effectively used to treat diseases since ancient times. The use of herbal remedies, dietary interventions, hydrotherapy, and lifestyle changes have been used throughout history and in nearly every culture to inhabit the Earth. Hippocrates, the Greek physician who lived 2400 years ago, first formulated the concept of *vis medicatrix naturae* -- "the healing power of nature". This concept has long been at the core of medicine in many cultures around the world and remains one of the central themes of naturopathic philosophy today.

Naturopathic medicine was popular and widely available throughout the United States well into the early part of the 20th century. In 1920, there were many naturopathic medical schools, thousands of naturopathic physicians, and scores of thousands of patients using naturopathic therapies around the country. But by

mid-century the rise of "technological medicine" and the discovery and increased use of "miracle drugs" like antibiotics were associated with the temporary decline of naturopathic medicine and most other methods of natural healing.

### **Naturopathic Medicine Today**

Today, more people than ever are seeking naturopathic medical care and naturopathic medical schools are growing at record rates to accommodate the increased demand for naturopathic education. Presently, there are three accredited four-year naturopathic medical programs in the United States, and one program in Canada which is a candidate for accreditation. Naturopathic medicine has an independent accrediting agency, the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education (CNME), which is the recognized authority for establishing and maintaining the educational standards for the profession. A nationally standardized licensing exam (NPLEX) has been established, which is used in nearly all of the states which currently license NDs. Currently, eleven states license NDs (as does Puerto Rico and four Canadian provinces). In these states, NDs practice as independent primary care general practitioners, with the ability to diagnose and treat medical conditions, perform physical exams, and order laboratory testing. In these states, many health care consumers specifically choose NDs as their primary care providers.

(Adapted from the CANP)

## **10 Vocabulary Words Used In Naturopathic Medicine**

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***Vital Force-*** The inherent ability of the body to heal and regain life sustaining homeostasis. An individual's ability to heal is dependent upon the quantity of vital force present at the time of onset and during the course of an illness. The greater the vital force the more able the body is to heal with minimal external intervention.

***Docere-*** The Latin word for physician, is commonly translated "Doctor as Teacher" and is one of the cornerstones of what defines a naturopathic physician in their interaction with their patients, including history taking, physical exam, review of diagnostic findings and treatment protocols. The better educated a patient regarding their health and treatments prescribed the greater the level of empowerment and compliance.

***Hydrotherapy-***The pure definition equates to the therapeutic use of water. In clinical practice this commonly takes the form of contrasting hot and cold (e.g. constitutional hydrotherapy or hot fomentations), neutral baths, sitz baths, Russian steam baths, and either temperature extreme by itself.

***Nature Cure-*** Generally used to describe the interventions to optimize health with therapies that mirror those that occur in nature. These approaches are simple by definition and focus on dietary, lifestyle and minor/gentle interventions to aid the healing power of nature.

***Vis Medicatrix Naturae-***

Simply defined as the healing power of nature. It speaks to the belief that the body has been instilled with the innate ability to heal. It is thus the goal of the physician to support and bolster the vital force, and ideally doing so first and foremost with nature cure techniques and then progressively more aggressive interventions.

***Healing Crisis-***

An aggravation of symptoms prior to the resolution of a disease state. It is believed by some physicians to be at times a necessary transition prior to true healings. An illustration: The worsening fever with an illness prior to resolution.

***Obstacle to Cure-***

Any single or combination of circumstances, barriers or other variables that must be removed or dealt with prior to the ability for true healing to occur, and the re-establishment of vital health.

***Like Cures Like-***

A term used to describe the concept that speaks to the mechanism of how homeopathy works. That is a substance that can cause a series of symptoms in a patient (during a proving), at a non-homeopathic dose when ingested, can in turn be used to treat the same symptoms when diluted and prepared as a homeopathic remedy.

***Nutritional Physical-***

An exam that can be conducted simultaneously with a traditional physical exam that identifies physical signs that indicate an increased likelihood of nutrient deficiencies. An illustration may include white dots within the fingernails, indicating a potential zinc deficiency or hyperkeratosis on the skin frequently seen on the triceps suggestive of suboptimal essential fatty acid or vitamin A levels.

***Germ Theory-***

It is believe by some physicians that germs are not the true cause of illness; rather it is a matter of susceptibility. Thus if a host subject is well nourished and possesses sufficient vital force, they can be exposed to a pathogen and shall not get ill. Hence, suggesting that indeed germs do not cause illness rather weaknesses within the host is the cause of disease.