

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE: IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

As increasing numbers of Americans seek to improve their health through natural means, the resurgence of naturopathic medicine requires its clarification and understanding. Society needs to be familiarized with the philosophy and treatments available in these age-old forms of medicine, empowering people to make educated choices as to the type of healthcare they require.

Naturopathic medicine is a complete and coordinated approach to health care. It is the art and science of diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease using natural therapies and gentle techniques. "Vis medicatrix naturae", the healing power of nature, is the foundation upon which naturopathic medicine is based. This means that the body has the ability to heal itself, which is seen when broken bones mend, and also that nature provides healing remedies, such as botanicals (herbs) that facilitate this.

The naturopathic physician views the patient as an individual, regarding not only the physical symptoms, but also the mental and emotional aspects involved. Thus, the individual is treated, not just the condition. Symptoms of disease are seen as indicators of an underlying cause of illness, perhaps due to improper body function and/or unfavorable dietary or lifestyle habits. Thus, optimizing health entails identifying and addressing "the causes". The relationship ensuing involves the doctor as a teacher, not a healer, which empowers the patient to realize that they create and control their health, through both treatment and prevention of disease.

Naturopathic doctors (ND) are licensed as primary health care physicians, who have undergone four years of pre-medical sciences (Bachelors degree) and a further four years of medical science, at one of the five accredited Naturopathic Medical schools in North America. Their education includes minor surgery, obstetrics, pharmacology, x-ray and lab diagnosis. Extra training is provided in clinical nutrition, botanical (herbal) medicine, Oriental medicine & acupuncture, physical medicine, homeopathic medicine and counseling.

Furthermore, naturopathic physicians are highly qualified to recognize when referrals to other health care professionals are required. They are trained to work in co-operation with all other health care practitioners, and may complement conventional medical treatment. All graduates are required to pass government-approved Board examinations for licensure as a naturopathic physician. All licensed naturopathic physicians are required to maintain their licensure by achieving required number of continuing education hours.

A variety of illnesses in people of all ages may be treated, as well as general health improvement through supporting and building of all key systems in the body, including immune function. An extensive medical history is taken, including a thorough investigation into diet, activity or work environment, exercise, lifestyle and mental/emotional factors involved. Also, if required, other tools can be utilized to assist the ND to determine the underlying causes. These include a basic screening physical exam and lab tests, such as a food allergy test, complete digestive stool analysis & parasitology testing, and hair mineral analysis or heavy metal urinalysis, which detects heavy metal toxicity & trace mineral imbalances.

Once identified, causes may be treated through various therapies, all of which ultimately act to enhance the body's own healing abilities. Treatments include acupuncture and oriental medicine, botanical (herbal) medicine, clinical nutrition, homeopathy, hydrotherapy, naturopathic manipulative therapy, physical therapies, dietary and lifestyle counseling.

Oriental Medicine is based on tongue and pulse diagnosis to highlight imbalances in Yin & Yang Energies, Qi (Chi) and Blood in differing organs in the body. Acupuncture & Eastern botanicals (herbs) can then be used to support, nourish, calm or stimulate the imbalanced or blocked energies in the body, which flow through meridians/channels. Acupuncture involves the needling of specific points along the respective meridians within which an imbalance is present.

Botanical medicine may include herbs from all over the world. Although botanicals are all-natural, safe and effective substitutes for pharmaceutical drugs, their effect may sometimes be dose-dependent, emphasizing the need for proper dosage, quantity and quality of the active ingredient. The use of herbs made by reputable companies (ie. professional products) is more cost-effective because the products are "standardized" for the active ingredient and clinical studies have been done with that specific brand of product for efficacy. In addition, professional products are tested (assayed) for individual ingredients, to ensure that what is on the label is actually in the product, and heavy metal and microbial testing is also performed. Cheap products usually are less effective and "you get what you pay for".

Botanicals do have a normalizing effect on the body, which can enhance function overall. However, people are biochemically individual and their condition, needs and other factors may dictate doses differing from the recommended dose. In addition, different herbs may have distinct cautions to their use, such as pregnancy, high blood pressure and anxiety. Self-diagnosis and self-prescription is not advocated, as this is usually a symptomatic approach to the problem, and does not rectify the underlying cause. It is advised to consult a licensed health care professional before starting a natural treatment plan.

Homeopathy is the use of natural substances, including plants and minerals, of multiple dilutions. The homeopathic remedies provide an "energetic" stimulus to facilitate the body's inherent healing ability. A constitutional remedy is usually determined by a naturopathic physician or a homeopathic practitioner, through a consultation interview to provide an individual's entire symptom picture of the mental, emotional and physical.

After selecting a naturopathic physician, it would be mutually beneficial to clarify your goals, interests and budget on the initial visit. Communicate your intentions, whether it is a specific treatment of symptoms or dietary alterations. Usually a ND will discuss the treatment plan based on the determined diagnosis, but it is up to you to relate your compliance, with respect to time and finances. Remember that a naturopathic physician is there to educate you with literature and information, and as your health coach, together you should decide how to optimize your health. Naturopathic medicine is an old age practice proven to provide the means to achieve well being. Natural medicine does work!

This article is for educational purposes only and does not advocate self-diagnosis. Due to individual variability, consultation with a licensed health professional, such as a Dr. Veronica

Hayduk, is highly recommended, prior to starting a natural treatment plan. You may contact her at 301.395.9118 or at www.drveronicahayduk.com.