

What a Naturopathic Doctor Can Do for You



The founder of Montana Integrative Medicine in Bozeman, John Neustadt, ND, has a regular column in *Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal*. His articles include "Vitamin E and All-Cause Mortality," "Herb-Drug Interactions: What Clinicians Need to Know," and "Western Diet and Inflammation."

Dr. Neustadt has published more than 100 research reviews and is coauthor with Jonathan Wright, MD, of *Thriving through Dialysis*.

People turn to naturopathic medicine for various reasons. They may seek a second opinion if they don't receive help from conventional medicine. They may be looking for a more holistic approach to their healthcare. Some want to work with a doctor knowledgeable in nutritional and botanical medicines, while others are searching for possible alternatives to drugs and surgery. Whatever the reasons, many people are finding benefit and value by adding a naturopathic doctor (ND) to their healthcare team.

Naturopathic medical education requires the same basic sciences and clinical coursework any physician receives, including anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, histology, minor surgery, pediatrics, geriatrics, cardiology, and pulmonology. However, naturopathic medical training focuses on options beyond drugs and surgery. NDs receive extensive training in nutritional medicine, botanical medicine, homeopathy, physical medicine (the use of hot- and cold-water therapies, soft-tissue work, and joint mobilizations), and lifestyle counseling.

Naturopathic medical philosophy has six unique tenets:

- (1) **The Healing Power of Nature** NDs recognize an inherent ability of the body to heal itself. It is the role of the naturopathic physician to identify and remove obstacles to healing and recovery, and to facilitate and enhance this self-healing process.
- (2) **Identify and Treat the Causes** Naturopathic physicians seek to remove the underlying causes of disease rather than just eliminating or suppressing symptoms.
- (3) **First Do No Harm** NDs strive to use methods that minimize harmful side effects (with the least force necessary to diagnose and treat), prevent suppression of symptoms, and respect each individual's self-healing process.
- (4) **Doctor as Teacher** The primary role of the naturopath is to educate and encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own health. NDs also recognize the therapeutic potential of the doctor/patient relationship.
- (5) **Treat the Whole Person** NDs recognize that total health includes physical, mental, emotional, genetic, environmental, social, spiritual, and other factors.
- (6) **Prevention** Naturopathic physicians encourage and emphasize disease prevention, i.e., assessing risk factors and heredity and susceptibility to disease, and making appropriate interventions in partnership with patients to prevent illness.

This philosophy emphasizes using the least invasive, most potentially effective methods available. It stresses health promotion and working with the body's innate healing mechanisms to treat disease. Equally important, naturopathy encourages people to take an active role in their own healthcare.

Whatever your goal, NDs believe the best treatments address what ails you today and prevent problems tomorrow. These doctors take the time to discover the underlying causes of what stands between you and optimal health, and they use customized, holistic treatments to help boost your immune system, increase your vitality, and prevent or treat a wide range of conditions.

To Locate a Naturopathic Doctor

The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians Web site lists the contact information of NDs around the country. To locate an ND who has graduated from a naturopathic medical school accredited by the U.S. Department of Education, visit www.naturopathic.org and then click "Find" to search for an ND near you.

—John Neustadt, ND