

Naturopathy

Naturopathy evolved out of the ancient healing traditions of Europe, with its roots firmly grounded in early Greek medical philosophy. Naturopathy is increasingly being recognised by mainstream medicine as a valuable and effective system for treating a variety of disorders.

Naturopathy is guided by six foundational principles, including:

- The healing power of nature
- First do no harm
- Find and treat the cause, not only the symptom
- Always treat the whole person, not only their disease
- Education
- Prevention.

Naturopathy maintains that the body can heal itself if it is given the right circumstances and conditions. A range of treatments or therapies are used to stimulate the body's own healing powers or 'vital force'. Treatment may include nutritional medicine, dietetics, herbal medicine, homoeopathy, lifestyle advice and tactile therapies, such as massage, acupressure or Bowen technique.

Many of the foundations of naturopathy – such as the importance of diet, clean fresh water, sunlight, exercise and stress management – have been adopted by conventional medicine.

Early detection and prevention of health issues

Naturopathy has a strong focus on the prevention of health issues and the early detection of a person's likelihood of developing a health disorder (predisposition). Naturopathy is also very effective at treating acute and chronic health issues.

Naturopathy aims to:

- Minimise symptoms
- Support the body's vital force (its capacity to self-heal)
- Re-balance the system so that illness is less likely to occur in the future
- Educate the patient to look after their own health and the health of their family.

Commonly treated disorders

The range of disorders commonly treated by naturopaths includes:

- Fatigue
- Digestive complaints
- Mood disorders and depression
- Allergies and sensitivities
- Behavioural problems
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Musculoskeletal complaints such as arthritis
- Cardiovascular (heart and blood vessel) problems
- High blood pressure
- Fertility problems
- Endocrine disturbance
- Hormonal imbalances, such as premenstrual tension and menopause.

The importance of homeostasis

Your body regulates itself to maintain healthy limits. For example, body temperature needs to be kept constant. On a cold day, your body will conserve heat by constricting the blood vessels close to the skin and directing blood flow to favour internal organs. On a hot day, your body will dilate blood vessels close to the skin and evaporate body heat with perspiration. Many other elements – such as blood gases, hormones and water – also need to be kept within strict limits.

The process of maintaining this healthy internal balance is called homeostasis. Naturopaths believe that illness is more likely to occur if the body is not in a state of homeostasis.

Assessment by a naturopath

A well-trained naturopath will want to know about your diet, lifestyle, family background and environment, as well as the history of your illness or complaint. This information is important so that the naturopath can discover the cause of the illness. You are treated as a whole person.

As well as taking a detailed health history, the naturopath may use other diagnostic techniques, such as:

- Iris analysis
- Kinesiology
- Blood analysis
- Stool and urine analysis
- Hair analysis
- Functional testing.

Treatment by a naturopath

A naturopath employs a range of non-invasive techniques and these include (but are not limited to):

- **Nutrition and dietary advice** – one of naturopathy's foundations. A poor diet stops the body from functioning well and a build up of toxins can lead to a range of illnesses. Whole, fresh and unprocessed foods are recommended
- **Herbal medicine** – herbs are as potent as pharmaceutical drugs and can be used to great effect
- **Homeopathy** – homeopathic treatments are used to stimulate the immune system
- **Hydrotherapy (water therapy)** – another foundation of naturopathy. For instance, the use of hot and cold compresses might be used for certain conditions to influence the flow of blood and body heat
- **Physical therapies** – such as massage, Bowen, acupuncture, bio-puncture or mechanotherapy
- **Kinesiology and integrated bio-dynamics (IBD)**
- **Counselling techniques** – emotional problems and stress can interfere with the healing process. Counselling techniques can include stress management strategies and life coaching.

Special considerations

Fasting is sometimes recommended. Make sure you are in the hands of a qualified and reputable naturopath before you start a fast.

Where to get help

- Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association Tel. (03) 9811 9990 or 1800 422 885

Things to remember

- Naturopathy is a philosophy underpinned by six foundational principles.
- Many of the underlying principles of naturopathy, such as the importance of diet and exercise, have been adopted by conventional medicine.
- The naturopathic philosophy maintains that the body can heal itself if given the right conditions.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association

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