

## Naturopathy

Naturopathy maintains that the body can heal itself if given the right circumstances and conditions. It uses a range of treatments to stimulate the body's own healing powers ('vital force'). Treatments include nutrition, dietetics, herbal medicine, homoeopathy and tactile therapies like massage, acupressure and 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.

Naturopathy has evolved out of the ancient healing traditions of Europe, with its roots firmly grounded in early Greek medical philosophy but with an expanded and scientific understanding from more modern sources. It is now recognised by mainstream medicine as a valuable and effective treatment for a variety of disorders.

### Early detection and prevention

Naturopathy has a strong focus on the prevention of health problems 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 acute symptoms
- Support the body's vital force (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
- Allergy and sensitivities
- Behavioural problems
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Degenerative illnesses, such as arthritis
- Cardiovascular problems
- High blood pressure
- Fertility problems
- Endocrine disturbance
- Hormonal imbalances, such as premenstrual tension and menopause.

### The importance of homeostasis

In order to maintain its health, the body regulates itself to stay within certain physiological limits no matter what the outside environment might be. For instance, body temperature needs to be kept constant. On a cold day, the 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, the 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 maintained within strict limits.

The process of maintaining this healthy internal balance is called homeostasis. Naturopathy believes that illness is more likely to occur if the body is 'knocked out' of homeostasis by lifestyle or environmental factors. The central idea is that the human body is capable of maintaining a healthy state if barriers such as excessive stress and poor nutrition are eliminated. This power to self-heal is called 'the vital force'.

## Holistic assessment

Your naturopath will want to know about your diet, lifestyle, family background and environment, as well as the history of your illness or complaint. This range of information is important to the practitioner, who seeks to discover the cause of the illness and treat you as a whole person, rather than target the symptoms alone.

As well as taking a comprehensive health history, the naturopath might employ other assessment techniques, such as:

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

## A range of non-invasive treatments

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

- **Nutrition and dietary advice** – this is one of naturopathy's foundations. A poor diet stops the body from functioning well and a build-up of toxins can contribute 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 disorders to influence the flow of blood and body heat.
- **Physical therapies** – such as massage, bower, 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

- Naturopath
- Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association Tel. (03) 9811 9990

## Things to remember

- Naturopathy is a collection of healing systems including nutrition, herbal medicine and massage.
- 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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