



## Naturopathy

Naturopathy has a preventative approach to health care – it aims to balance the body so that illness is less likely to occur in the future. A naturopath will want to know about a patient's diet, lifestyle, family background and environment, as well as the history of their complaint or illness. This range of information is important to the practitioner, who seeks to discover the cause of illness and treat the whole person, rather than target the symptoms alone. The range of non-invasive techniques used in naturopathy includes:

- Nutrition
- Herbal medicine
- Massage.

Naturopathy evolved out of ancient healing traditions and is now recognised by mainstream medicine as a valuable and effective treatment for a variety of disorders. Many naturopathic beliefs – such as the importance of nutrition, exercise and stress management – have been adopted by conventional Western medicine.

### Commonly treated disorders

The range of disorders commonly treated by naturopaths includes:

- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Degenerative illnesses, such as arthritis
- Depression
- Digestive complaints
- Fatigue
- Heart disease
- Hormonal imbalances, such as premenstrual tension and menopause.

### The importance of homeostasis

To maintain health and life, the body regulates itself to stay within certain limits, whatever the outside environment. 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 stress and poor diet are taken away. This power to self-heal is called 'the vital force'.

### A range of non-invasive treatments

Naturopathy maintains that the body can heal itself if given the right conditions. The treatments are non-invasive and are designed to stimulate the body's own healing powers. They include:

- **Nutrition** – 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.
- **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.
- **Traditional Chinese medicine** – including acupuncture, acupressure and Chinese herbs.
- **Counselling techniques** – emotional problems and stress can interfere with the healing process. Counselling techniques may include hypnotherapy and stress management.
- **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.
- **Physical therapies** – such as osteopathy.
- **Touch therapies** – such as massage.

### 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

- Your doctor
- Naturopath
- Australian Naturopathic Practitioners Association Tel. (03) 9889 0334

### 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.

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