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Why Choose Naturopathic Medicine?

By Dr. Tara Barker

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Naturopathic medicine is a system and philosophy of medicine that has been around for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years. Before the advent of 'conventional' medicine, which uses a wide variety of drugs and surgical procedures, almost every doctor learned how to use herbs, minerals, homeopathy, and other natural methods to treat disease. Since the early 1900's and with the discovery of antibiotics, usage and public knowledge of naturopathic medicine has declined. This was most likely due to the 'quick fix' nature of many of the new drugs developed and increased safety of surgical procedures. Diseases such as influenza and measles, which today are generally nuisances and easily treated in most people, were very scary and sometimes life threatening in these earlier times. The plague literally plagued people. Today we are blessed with better opportunities for proper nutrition, hygiene, and information about these diseases, all of which lessen the threat of many of the more common diseases becoming life threatening. The attraction that people had towards conventional medicine was and is understandable. Treatments that decrease symptoms of a disease are often well received by patients who are dealing with a troublesome condition. Most advances in technology are viewed as progress and people want the best, especially where their health or that of their loved ones is concerned. The problem that came with this flux towards conventional medicine was that it was new and no one knew what the side effects or long-term effects of using synthetic drugs would be. Also, most people abandoned the more natural methods of health care and stopped caring for themselves in a way that would keep them strong and vital. Instead they began using pills and surgery as 'fixes' when things went wrong. They began to eat more processed foods that have fewer vitamins and minerals. Our environment became more polluted. Most doctors know little about nutrition, how or what to eat, or what to do with people affected by the environment. As well, the more scientific medicine gets, the less people understand it. This leads to people feeling ignorant about health matters and leaving all the power in their doctor's hands.

So, here we are today. When people feel sick or know something is wrong, they make an appointment and usually get a prescription. If that doesn't work, another prescription is tried. If a person is lucky, they get sick very infrequently and live healthy lives. Complications arise when the treatments given

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don't work or cause side effects that need another treatment to lessen them. What happens if you have allergies, asthma, and diabetes? How many prescriptions do you take? What if the drugs given interact with each other or cause a nutritional deficiency? What about the people who are on a drug for the rest of their lives? What about people with chronic diseases that have been told they have no cure but the symptoms can be 'managed'?

What causes many of the above problems is the philosophy of the medicine used. The focus should not be (however contrary it may sound) how to get rid of whatever ails you, but why it began. If you can find out what causes your disease and why it began for you, it is entirely possible to foster your health in such a way that your body heals itself. It does little good to get rid of an ear infection in your child if it returns again. Why take an antiviral daily to suppress herpes outbreaks when this can be done with lifestyle and natural methods that do the same thing while enhancing your immunity? If you have advanced heart disease, diabetes, or cancer, what feelings of hope do you have that your life can be enhanced? If you take medications daily, perhaps in increasing doses, for the rest of your life with

your only hope to have better or stable lab test results, that doesn't sound like the quality life you could be having. Did you know that with changes to your lifestyle and natural therapies you could increase the energy you feel as well as possibly reverse many of the damaging changes you now live with?

There are natural treatments for every complaint. I once heard from a wise doctor, "There are no incurable diseases, only incurable people". What he meant was that every case of cancer may not be curable, but it is possible to cure cancer. No condition is incurable. What happens in treatment is more a factor of the person, the nature of the disease, and other variables, and not so much which disease is being treated. It is more difficult, of course, to treat diseases that are long-standing, severe, or in other ways complicated. But that does not mean it can never be done. If a person does not want treatment and they get something from being in the place they are at, that makes recovery all the more difficult. It is much easier to treat conditions when they first start and when the person wishes to be well. But still there are no guarantees.

What tends to work best for most people is a multifaceted approach to treating their condition. First, treat the whole person. Find out what their needs are and treat them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, as they need it. Treat their whole body. Migraines, arthritis, and urinary infections can be related and not separate diseases. A person may not need antibiotics or removal of an organ, they may need something that seems entirely unrelated. The toddler with constant stomach pains may not need medication; he may need to change day cares. Try to understand what is going on for the person.

Second, treat them in such a way as to increase their vitality. The goal is to increase the healing response within so that the body becomes healthier and reverses the disease process naturally and in its time (if this is possible). It may be necessary to provide some symptomatic relief, but the goal of a treatment should not be to simply suppress the symptoms. Just because symptoms are gone does not mean that the disease is not there. The goal is a complete cure and no return of the condition (sometimes this is possible, at other times it is not). Your body holds an incredible healing force that wants to keep you in harmonious balance at all times. Think of the miracle of healing a broken bone. Think of how microorganisms cause your lungs much distress in bronchitis, yet how well you breathe

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and how complete the cure when the body is done healing that condition. Think of the miracle of life itself. If disease arises when we hinder the body in maintaining its perfect balance, then restoring conditions of balance will help our bodies to heal themselves. After all, it is not the antibiotic that heals you. The antibiotic simply kills off enough bacteria to allow your body the upper hand. Ask yourself if the body shouldn't have the upper hand to begin with. If you really do need antibiotics, what is causing the bacteria to gain the upper hand?

Naturopathic medicine strives to restore balance by removing any obstacles keeping your body from healing itself. Physicians using this medicine understand the importance of treating each person individually and in a way that helps restore their natural vitality. They also try to use the most gentle yet effective treatment possible to avoid causing side effects or interactions between treatments. Naturopathic physicians also recognize the importance of using conventional medicine when it is necessary. They will also use appropriate lab work, x-rays, and other tools for diagnosis and tracking when necessary. As all physicians, they frequently will refer a complicated condition to providers who can give the patient the best care along with the natural treatments. Naturopaths regard the wants and needs of their patients highly. A patient is encouraged to share their goals and take an active part in their healthcare. Consultations and treatments are generally longer than those with a conventional practitioner so questions can be addressed and a healing relationship established.

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Homeopathy - Five Things to Know before You 'Go There'

By Marjorie Geiser, RD, NSCA-CPT

With natural health care so popular, an area that has shown incredible growth is that of homeopathic medicine. But, although you can find homeopathic remedies on health food store shelves, are you really clear on what a homeopathic specialist is and what these medicines can do? This article will address five things to know before you choose a homeopathic specialist or buy those homeopathic medicines off the shelf.

What are they?

Homeopathic remedies are medicines made by homeopathic pharmacies in accordance with the processes described in the Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia of the United States and are regulated by the FDA. These are not considered supplements. The remedies could be made from plants, minerals, animals or even from chemical drugs, such as penicillin or streptomycin. These substances are then carefully diluted, called potentization, until very little of the original substance remains. Because these are very dilute, small doses of medications, and they are available over the counter, many people feel

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they are safe. However, for serious health problems, a person should seek the advice of a knowledgeable healthcare professional. If they choose, it could be from one familiar with homeopathic medicine.

Are they effective?

The fact that very little of the original substance remains, the question comes up how can they even be effective. According to homeopaths, this is based on similarities. When a similarity exists, a person is thought to have a hypersensitivity to that substance. Thus, while the remedy contains very little, in the practical sense, of the original material, it still contains the essence of the substance, or its energy. It's thought to work by creating a resonance within the body that catalyzes it to begin a healing process.

How this works and if it's effective is very controversial among traditional medical practitioners. To determine if a particular homeopathic drug is effective, experiments, called drug provings, are conducted. In these experiments, researchers administer continual doses of the substance to a healthy individual until a reaction to the substance is achieved. Once it is known what symptoms a substance causes, then it's known what symptoms and illnesses it will cure. There have been several systematic reviews of placebo-controlled trials on homeopathy that have reported that its effects seem to be more than just placebo. One observational study found that patients were very satisfied with homeopathic treatments and that both they and their physicians noticed significant improvement. There is also evidence from randomized, controlled trials that homeopathy may be effective for treatment of otitis media in children, muscle soreness after running, and attention deficit hyperactivity!

y disorder. Again, though, I would like to emphasize that it would be wise to consult with a specialist before self-medicating, especially when it comes to children.

Who practices homeopathy?

The practice of homeopathy is incorporated into medical care by a broad range of healthcare practitioners. Medical doctors (MD's) and doctors of osteopathy (DO's) may elect to study homeopathy as a post-graduate specialty. Naturopathic doctors (ND's) study homeopathy as part of their naturopathic school training. Naturopathic medicine is a distinct profession of primary healthcare that emphasizes prevention and the promotion of optimal health. The scope of practice includes all aspects of family and primary care, from pediatrics to geriatrics, and all natural medicine modalities, including homeopathic medicine.

Where did it come from?

Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician who earned his doctorate of medicine degree in 1779 is recognized as the founder of homeopathy. Through experiments on himself, and later with his patients, he developed a system of rules and laws of medicine that he codified into a treatise called the "Organon of rational therapeutics", first published in 1810. The sixth edition, published in 1921, is still used today as a basic homeopathy text. It was brought to the US in 1825 by several doctors who had studied in Europe. Although at one time there were 22 homeopathic medical colleges in the US, and one out of five doctors used homeopathy, by the 1940's there were no homeopathic schools in the US.

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Do your homework!

Naturopathic physicians are licensed as healthcare providers in 13 states with legal provisions allowing the practice of naturopathic medicine in several other states. To qualify for a license, the applicant must pass the licensing exam and satisfy all licensing requirements, such as have attended a resident course of 4 years and 4,100 hours of study from a college or university recognized by the state examining board. There are special certifications for various healthcare professionals. For MD's and DO's, there is the Diplomat in Homeotherapeutics (DHt). For ND's, the certification is the DHANP (Diplomat of the Homeopathic Academy of Naturopathic Physicians), and for homeopaths of all professions, there is the CCH (Certified in Classical Homeopathy). What is important to know is that in states without licensure requirements for homeopathy, anyone can claim to be practicing 'homeopathic medicine'.

Homeopathic medicine could be a great alternative to traditional medicine. It's important to look into the background and training of anyone practicing homeopathic medicine, however, as many people promote themselves as an expert without the proper education. The National Center for Homeopathy (<http://www.homeopathy.org>) serves as a resource and training center for the practice of homeopathy. The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (<http://www.naturopathic.org>) provides information on licensing and education requirements for those promoting themselves as a doctor of naturopathy. For a good overview of the art and science of homeopathy and its basic tenets, suggested reading is *The Emerging Science of Homeopathy: Complexity, Biodynamics and Nanopharmacology*, 2nd edition, by Bellavite P. Signorini.

Marjorie Geiser has been teaching health, fitness and nutrition since 1982. She is a nutritionist, registered dietitian, certified personal trainer and life coach. As the owner of MEG Fitness, Marjorie's goal for her clients is to help them incorporate healthy eating and fitness into their busy lives. To learn more about her incredible 30-Day Fitness Focus program for nutrition and fitness analysis and

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