



## **Naturopathic Medicine: Frequently Asked Questions**

A service for consumers from the [American Association of Naturopathic Physicians \(AANP\)](#) and the [Institute for Natural Medicine \(INM\)](#)

*The AANP and the INM would like to acknowledge the [Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges \(AANMC\)](#) for its contributions to the content of this FAQ. The AANMC was established in 2001 to advance the naturopathic medical profession by actively supporting the academic efforts of accredited naturopathic medical schools.*

### **FAQ #4:**

#### **What is the difference between a licensed naturopathic doctor and a naturopath?**

Licensed naturopathic doctors are regulated at the state level to practice naturopathic medicine. Naturopathic medical students attend [accredited](#), four-year, in-residence, naturopathic medical schools where they study biomedical sciences such as anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pathology, and pharmacology. Their medical education incorporates the latest advances in science and natural approaches to illness prevention and management. Students complete a minimum of 4,100 hours of class and clinical training, including over 1,200 hours of hands-on, supervised, clinical training.

Naturopathic doctors can order diagnostic tests such as blood tests, X-rays, MRIs, and, in some states, prescribe prescription drugs and hormones and perform minor surgery. According to the Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC) 2015 [survey](#) of alumni, 50 percent of naturopathic doctors practicing full-time self-report as primary care physicians, while 28 percent report working as natural health specialists. In addition, like conventional medical doctors (MDs), a growing number of naturopathic doctors choose to focus their practices in specialty areas. Specialty associations currently exist for [Endocrinology](#), [Environmental Medicine](#), [Gastroenterology](#), Parenteral Therapies, [Pediatrics](#), [Primary Care Medicine](#), and [Oncology](#).

A naturopathic doctor must pass rigorous professional board exams prior to being licensed or regulated in a state that regulates the practice of naturopathic medicine. State mandated regulatory bodies oversee standards of practice, complaints, and discipline for all licensed jurisdictions. Licensed naturopathic doctors also must carry malpractice insurance and

maintain a commitment to lifelong learning through continuing education. These requirements are safeguards to ensure patients' rights to quality naturopathic care.

The exam required to qualify for naturopathic doctor licensure is administered by the [North American Board of Naturopathic Examiners \(NABNE\)](#). The [Naturopathic Physicians Licensing Examinations \(NPLEX\)](#) is a two-part examination. Only students and graduates from accredited or candidate naturopathic programs are eligible to sit for the NPLEX.

In contrast to naturopathic doctors, naturopaths have varied levels of education and experience and may obtain this experience in a purely online or correspondence format. The education is [not accredited](#) by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and will not qualify students to take the NPLEX examination or lead to licensure in any regulated jurisdiction in North America.

**Be aware that while the terms may be used interchangeably, they are not the same**

As a patient, you should know that the terms "naturopathic doctor" and "naturopath" are often used interchangeably by medical practitioners in other disciplines and the public, even though naturopaths do not have the same training or privileges. Knowing the difference between naturopathic doctors and naturopaths can help you make informed decisions about which type of provider can best help you.

For more information on how naturopathic doctors are educated, trained, and licensed, see FAQ#1 in this service, available [here](#).