



Naturopathic Medicine: Frequently Asked Questions

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

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FAQ #8:

How do naturopathic doctors and conventionally trained doctors work together?

There are a number of situations where naturopathic and conventionally trained doctors working together deliver care for some patients. Examples include:

- People with one or more chronic diseases or lifestyle-related conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, or hypertension, which require a high level of patient engagement in their own health as well as time to realize the full benefits of recommended treatments
- People with cancer or other diseases where commonly used medical treatments can cause significant side effects that can undermine health
- People seeking relief from chronic pain without using highly addictive opioids
- People who want to build and maintain a foundation of optimal health and well-being
- People with symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, and gastrointestinal distress who have exhausted options with conventionally trained medical doctors and still do not have an actionable diagnosis or are not improving with current treatments

These are areas where naturopathic medicine excels, providing diagnostic approaches and treatments that complement those of conventionally trained doctors. Naturopathic doctors are [educated and trained](#) in accredited naturopathic medical colleges to diagnose, prevent and treat acute and chronic illness and restore and establish optimal health by supporting a person's inherent self-healing process. In addition, they are trained to identify underlying causes of illness and develop personalized treatment plans to address them. They also are

known for their unique [Therapeutic Order](#), which identifies the natural order in which naturopathic therapies should be applied to provide the greatest benefit with the least potential for adverse reactions.

In collaborations with conventionally trained doctors, the Therapeutic Order can help guide decision-making for the care team.

Diagnostic tools commonly used by conventionally trained doctors include detailed health, disease, and prescription drug histories, physical exams, and targeted laboratory testing and imaging. Naturopathic doctors also consider detailed dietary records, lifestyle habits and choices, exercise history, and social/emotional factors to assess patients' needs. These approaches can open doors to new treatment pathways and options.

For example, significant research shows that lifestyle-change programs that focus on nutritional interventions, resiliency, exercise, and emotional well-being can sometimes reverse the progression of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and high cholesterol.¹ Naturopathic medical treatment plans include these and other therapies such as botanical medicines and clinical nutrition, acupuncture, hydrotherapy, and counseling, just to name a few.

In collaborations of naturopathic and conventionally trained doctors, sometimes one practitioner takes the lead and sometimes the other. An example of a situation in which a conventionally trained doctor would provide primary treatment and a naturopathic doctor would provide adjunctive treatment is cancer care. For cancer patients, surgeons, medical oncologists, and radiation oncologists provide surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation as primary treatments while a naturopathic doctor supports a patients' vitality and natural ability to heal, which helps them tolerate the often difficult or toxic side effects of cancer treatments.

While patients can benefit from these collaborations, naturopathic and conventionally trained doctors who work together report that each practitioner learns from the other—opening up new possibilities for both and improving patient outcomes.

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

For more information on naturopathic medicine and the Therapeutic Order, see FAQ #2 in this service, available [here](#).

¹ Guarneri E, Horrigan, BJ, Pechura, CM. 2010. The Efficacy and Cost-Effectiveness of Integrative Medicine: A Review of the Medical and Corporate Literature. Bravewell Collaborative Report. June 2010.