

## **Balancing Health and Wellness through a Combination of Conventional and Naturopathic Medicine**

*By: Dr. Ted Suzelis, N.D.*

Many people are interested in natural medicine, but are concerned with drug-herb interactions and what their medical doctor will think. This is a valid concern and people should understand that there are practitioners that can bridge the gap between their medical doctor and natural medicine. These practitioners are called naturopathic physicians (N.D.). Naturopathic physicians are specialized doctors of natural medicine with training in conventional medicine and natural medicine. Having training in both fields enables these doctors to understand your medical condition and the treatments you are receiving from your medical doctor as well as the ability to create a complementary program of natural therapies to give you a truly holistic approach to healthcare.

### **Naturopathic Education**

Naturopathic physicians attend a 4 year residential medical school after completing a bachelor's degree. Naturopathic medical schools combine a standard medical curriculum with extensive training in clinical nutrition, acupuncture, homeopathic medicine, botanical medicine, psychology, and counseling. A recent comparison of conventional medical schools and naturopathic medical schools showed the following totals for classroom and clinical educational hours: Johns Hopkins (5162 hours), Stanford (5280 hours), Yale (4311 hours + thesis), National College of Naturopathic Medicine (4668 hours), Bastyr University (4472 hours), and Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine (4469 hours). There are currently four accredited naturopathic medical schools in the United States: National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, OR, Bastyr University in Seattle, WA, Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine in Tempe, AZ, and the University of Bridgeport in Bridgeport, CT. It is important to ensure that the naturopath you are receiving care from has adequate training and is a graduate of one of these schools.

### **What does a Naturopathic Physician do?**

Naturopathic physicians are "health coaches," providing evaluations and recommendations for patients who are committed to becoming healthier. Using holistic and nontoxic approaches to therapy, naturopathic physicians place a strong emphasis on stimulating the body's own healing power. Most patients will receive recommendations on lifestyle issues like nutrition and exercise, along with individualized recommendations on vitamin and mineral supplements, herbs, homeopathics or other naturopathic therapies.

Through their understanding of conventional medicine, naturopathic physicians can enhance the treatment a person is receiving from their medical doctor by recommending nutrients that may enhance the function of a medication, reduce its side effects, or replacing nutrients that are known to be depleted by the medication. This, along with addressing underlying health issues will speed a person's recovery and may even allow them to become healthy enough to discontinue the medication at some point. An example of this would be someone who has high cholesterol that has been prescribed

Lipitor? . One well documented side effect of Lipitor? is that it reduces the body's level of a nutrient called CoEnzyme Q10 (CoQ10). A deficiency in CoQ10 can lead to a greater risk of heart disease. A naturopathic approach to this patient would be to recommend this patient to start taking CoQ10 and other nutrients and herbs that will help the body to reduce its production of cholesterol as well as a customized diet and exercise regimen. With a combination of these recommendations and addressing any other health concerns the person may be having, it is conceivable that they could eventually discontinue taking Lipitor? , but only when their medical doctor feels it is appropriate.

Another way that naturopathic medicine can be complementary to conventional medicine is by seeking the care of a naturopathic physician for a condition recently diagnosed by your medical doctor, where a prescription medication is not immediately necessary. In this instance you have the opportunity to improve your health and possibly avoid starting the medication.

A balance between conventional medicine and naturopathic medicine is part of the current trend towards complementary or integrative medicine. Most major medical institutions are opening "Integrative Medical Centers" or "Complementary and Alternative Medical Centers." As the trend towards balancing these two forms of medicine continues, so will the improvement of personal health.

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