

What is Naturopathic Medicine?

By Rachel Vanden Berg, Naturopathic Doctor

I have a brand new baby girl. After she's finished nursing, she instinctively rests her tiny cheek on my breast. This is something I have noticed in both of my children – the natural tendency to sleep lying cheek to breast. I am reminded of the value of observing and listening to our instinctive behaviours. Several studies have shown that skin to skin contact (and especially infant cheek to mother's breast) initiates a physiological response resulting in growth and healing. This is a perfect example of the healing power of nature. By sitting back, listening, and observing our children, we can learn valuable lessons about the innate needs and abilities of humankind; my inspiration for this article.

The healing power of nature is one of the six principles of naturopathic medicine – these principles outline what is to me, the strength and beauty of naturopathic medicine.

First, do no harm

Emphasis of treatment is on gentle non-invasive therapies. Recommended natural treatments minimize the risk of side effects and avoid harmful suppression of symptoms. Note that the word “natural” does not imply safety. Even so-called “natural” products can be harmful if used incorrectly. It is essential to consult with your health care provider in the use of natural substances.

Co-operate with the healing power of nature

The baby at my breast is a perfect illustration of this principle. Naturopaths acknowledge the innate healing power of your physical, mental and emotional self. Your naturopath serves as a catalyst, helping you listen to your body, and use this information to initiate changes which restore your natural healing process.

Identify and treat the cause

Symptoms are an expression of illness. They are not the cause of illness. Rather than suppressing symptoms, a naturopath strives to determine their underlying cause. The cause may be due to diet, lifestyle, postural habits or mental / emotional history. All these factors must be balanced in the pursuit of wellness.

Treat the whole person

I have never had a single elbow, or a lone liver walk into my office. Thus, naturopaths do not treat just a single body part. The body is nothing without all individual parts working together to create a cohesive whole. A naturopath considers all factors: physical, genetic, mental, social and environmental. They recognize that health

affects you as a whole, not just your physical self. Looking at your entire health history – past and present – they piece together your unique story and create a treatment program which addresses all aspects of your health.

Doctor as teacher

You should leave your naturopath's office knowing more than when you entered. The role of the naturopathic physician is to empower and facilitate you in taking responsibility for your own health.

Prevention

Living in a reactionary society, we have become accustomed to waiting until discomfort arises before beginning treatment. The ultimate goal of any health care system should be maintenance of health and prevention of illness. Your naturopath teaches prevention, guiding you in the path to optimal wellness.

We are accustomed to asking “how did I get this?” or “why do I have these symptoms?”. Instead of focusing all our resources into answering these questions, your naturopathic physician will guide you in a deeper search for the answer to the question “What are these symptoms trying to tell me?”.