

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



HIGHLIGHTS

1. Numerous research studies of naturopathic treatments for common conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic low back pain, and anxiety have shown that naturopathic medicine is both safe and effective.
2. Licensed NDs complete a rigorous, four-year, in-residence, science-based, post-graduate medical education at an accredited naturopathic medical school.
3. Medical malpractice insurance rates for naturopathic doctors are among the lowest of any medical services provider.
4. Few medical treatments are 100% safe, but some are safer than others.

FAQ #12: Is naturopathic medicine safe?

Naturopathic medicine emphasizes prevention and the self-healing process to treat each person holistically and improve health outcomes. As a health care consumer evaluating whether naturopathic medicine is safe, you should be aware of the following facts:

1. Numerous research studies of naturopathic treatments for common conditions such as heart disease, diabetes², chronic low back pain³, and anxiety⁴ have shown that naturopathic medicine is both safe and effective.

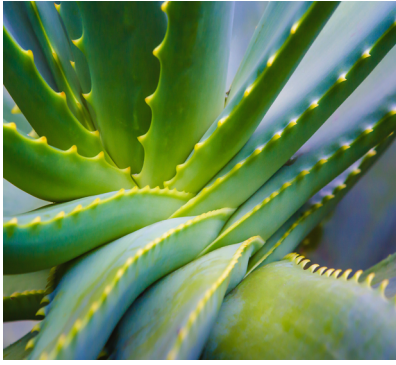
Significant research shows that lifestyle-change programs that focus on nutritional interventions, exercise, and emotional well-being can sometimes reverse the progression of chronic disease safely and effectively. Naturopathic medical treatment plans focus on these and other therapies, such as botanical medicine, clinical nutrition, hydrotherapy, and counseling to name just a few.

Naturopathic doctors are trained to diagnose and evaluate health conditions as primary care physicians and understand when and if a referral to conventional health care provider is indicated, or if further diagnostic evaluation is necessary.

Naturopathic and conventionally trained doctors may also work together to deliver safe and effective health care. One such example is cancer care. For cancer patients, surgeons, medical oncologists, and radiation oncologists provide surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation as primary treatments while naturopathic doctors support a patient's vitality and natural ability to heal, which helps them tolerate the often difficult side effects of conventional cancer treatments. For information on how naturopathic medicine supports breast cancer prevention and treatment, see our FAQ on the topic [here](#).

2. Licensed naturopathic doctors complete a rigorous, four-year, in-residence, science-based, post-graduate medical education consisting of 4,100 hours of coursework and clinical training at an accredited naturopathic medical school.

During naturopathic medical school, students are educated in the biomedical sciences as well as the latest advances in science in combination with natural approaches to therapy. They also study disease prevention.



Naturopathic Medicine uses natural substances to restore & regenerate



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Accredited schools require graduates to complete four years of training and cover disciplines including: a standard medical curriculum, clinical nutrition, acupuncture, homeopathic medicine, botanical medicine, physical medicine, and counseling. For at least the last two years of their medical program, naturopathic medical students intern in clinical settings under the close supervision of licensed doctors.

To be licensed, naturopathic medical students must pass two sets of board exams. Educating competent, well-trained clinicians is how naturopathic medicine maintains its excellent safety record. For more information on the education and training of naturopathic doctors, see our FAQ on the topic [here](#).

3. Medical malpractice insurance rates for naturopathic doctors are among the lowest of any medical services provider.

The average annual medical malpractice insurance rate for naturopathic doctors was \$3,802 annually as of January 2017, according to NNMIC, the largest malpractice insurer for naturopathic doctors. By comparison, the average annual rate for conventionally trained MDs was \$18,646.

A number of factors go into determining malpractice rates for a medical professional. Most important are whether there is the potential for a severe claim based on the nature of typical injuries or damage, and whether prior claims have been filed against a doctor.

Malpractice rates for naturopathic doctors are almost five times lower than those for conventionally trained medical doctors because insuring an MD is riskier for an insurance company than insuring a naturopathic doctor.

4. Few medical treatments are 100% safe, but some are safer than others.

Few medical therapies are safe for everyone, in every situation in which they are used. For example, there are 2.7 million serious adverse reactions to legally prescribed prescription drugs each year, resulting in 128,000 deaths. Having said that, naturopathic medicine is known for its unique [Therapeutic Order](#), a set of guidelines naturopathic doctors use in clinical decision making to provide the greatest benefit to the patient with the least potential for damage. The Therapeutic Order begins by offering minimally invasive therapies aimed at supporting the body and ends in more invasive procedures such as chemical therapies and surgery. Naturopathic doctors will help patients achieve optimal health by first removing obstacles such as poor diet and lifestyle behaviors; stimulating self-healing mechanisms, strengthening weakened systems, and correcting structural integrity with minimally invasive therapies; and using natural substances to restore health.

Some of the content for this FAQ first appeared in an article by [Dr. Matthew Strickland, ND](#), on the website of the [Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges \(AANMC\)](#).

- ¹ Seely D, Szczurko O, Cooley K, et al. Naturopathic medicine for the prevention of cardiovascular disease: a randomized clinical trial. *CMAJ*. 2013 Jun 11;185(9):E409-1. Accessed October 24, 2017: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23630244/>
- ² Oberg EB, Bradley R, Hsu C, Sherman KJ, Catz S, Calabrese C, et al. (2012) Patient-reported experiences with first-time naturopathic care for type-2 diabetes. *PLoS One* 2012;7:11. Accessed October 24, 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0048549>
- ³ Szczurko O, Cooley K, Busse JW, et al. Naturopathic care for chronic low back pain: a randomized trial. *PLoS One*. 2007 Sep 19;2(9):e919. Accessed October 24, 2017: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17878954>
- ⁴ Cooley K, Szczurko O, Perri D, et al. Naturopathic care for anxiety: a randomized controlled trial. *Naturopathic care for anxiety: a randomized controlled trial. PLoS One*. 2009 Aug 31;4(8):e6628. Accessed October 24, 2017: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19718255>
- ⁵ [http://www.naturopathic.org/files/NCMIC%20Letter%20re%20Malpractice%20Risk%201-26-17\(2\).pdf](http://www.naturopathic.org/files/NCMIC%20Letter%20re%20Malpractice%20Risk%201-26-17(2).pdf)
- ⁶ Light, DW. New prescription drugs: a major health risk with few offsetting advantages. Harvard University Center for Ethics blog. 2014 June 27. Accessed October 24, 2017: <https://ethics.harvard.edu/blog/new-prescription-drugs-major-health-risk-few-offsetting-advantages>