



Naturopathic Medicine: Frequently Asked Questions

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

FAQ #6:

How does naturopathic medicine lower health care costs?

As concerns grow over high health care costs and poor health outcomes in the United States, a growing number of policymakers, health care practitioners, and other stakeholders are calling for an expansion of the focus of our health care system to keeping people healthy in addition to providing medical treatment after a person gets sick. To accomplish this change, health care professionals from a broad range of disciplines must come together in primary care teams. Trained as primary care doctors and to emphasize prevention, licensed naturopathic doctors have a central role to play in these efforts.

Naturopathic medicine is a distinct practice of medicine that emphasizes wellness and the self-healing process to treat each person holistically. Licensed naturopathic doctors are known for following a unique Therapeutic Order, an approach that identifies the natural order in which naturopathic therapies should be applied to provide the greatest benefit with the least potential for harm. This approach leads to improved outcomes and lower health care costs.

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

Here are eight ways naturopathic medicine lowers health care costs:

1. Address the root causes of illness.

By addressing and treating the root causes of disease rather than its symptoms, the need for repeated, expensive, and sometimes ineffective treatment is eliminated. For example, the underlying causes of conditions such as high cholesterol and diabetes is often poor diet and lifestyle factors such as lack of exercise. Changing these lifestyle factors can eliminate the need for one or more prescription medications that would typically be recommended for the rest of that patient's life.

2. Offer less expensive diagnosis and treatment.

Naturopathic medical diagnostics and treatments are often less expensive than those in conventional medicine. Many treatments incur no cost whatsoever. One example is taking the time to engage patients in ongoing discussions of lifestyle choices, making the connection between these choices and their health condition and guiding patients to healthier options.

3. Reduce the need for expensive surgical procedures, when appropriate.

According to the American College of Surgeons and the American Medical Association, among the most common surgeries performed in the United States are coronary artery bypass surgery, carotid endarterectomy, and low back pain surgery.¹ Because naturopathic doctors often suggest less expensive, non-surgical options to patients, some of these expensive surgeries can be avoided. One major study investigating the effects of lifestyle improvement in patients with coronary atherosclerosis found that after only one year of following lifestyle recommendations, about 80 percent of participants were able to bring about plaque regression and avoid surgery without the use of lipid lowering agents.² The study estimated that this would save almost \$30,000 per patient in the first year alone.³

1 Stanford Health Care. General Surgery-Common Surgical Procedures. Online access:

<https://stanfordhealthcare.org/medical-treatments/g/general-surgery/procedures.html>

2 Ornish D, Brown SE, Scherwitz LW, et al. Can lifestyle changes reverse coronary heart disease? The Lifestyle Heart Trial. *Lancet*. 1990;336:129–133.

3 Guarneri E, Horringan, 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.

4. Decrease costs associated with adverse reactions to prescription drugs.

According to a 2014 [report](#) from the Harvard University Center for Ethics, there are 2.7 million serious adverse reactions to prescription drugs that have been legally prescribed each year, resulting in 128,000 deaths. This makes prescription drugs a major health risk, ranking fourth with stroke as a leading cause of death. Whenever possible, naturopathic doctors prescribe natural therapies first, turning to prescription pharmacology when they are necessary.

5. Reduce the incidence of illnesses and fatalities caused by hospital errors.

Research shows that preventable hospital errors are the third leading cause of death in the United States.¹ Naturopathic medicine focuses on preventative care and patient education, which can reduce the length of hospital stays and hospital readmissions. The power of patient education has been well documented. A case study at Sentara Virginia Beach Hospital found that when heart failure patients were provided with education on their condition, their readmission rates dropped by 74 percent and hospital stays were 13 percent shorter.²

¹ Makary MA, Daniel M. Medical error-the third leading cause of death in the US. *BMJ*. 2016 05 3;353:i2139. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.i2139> PMID: 27143499. Online access: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27143499>

² GetWellNetwork. *Improving Heart Failure Outcomes through Interactive Patient Care: The Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital Experience*. 2009. Online access: http://amandanenaber.weebly.com/uploads/6/1/7/6/6176087/hf-get_well_network.pdf

6. Lower malpractice rates, resulting in reduced patient costs.

Malpractice insurance rates are much lower for naturopathic doctors than they are for conventional medical doctors. According to NCMIC, the largest malpractice insurer for naturopathic doctors, the yearly rate for naturopathic doctors in Arizona, Oregon, Minnesota, and New Hampshire is approximately \$3,803. Rates for MDs in the same states are \$18,646.¹

¹ Whitmer, Mike. Letter to Ron Mensching at National University of Health Sciences. Jan 2017. Online access: [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)

7. Offer disease prevention.

Naturopathic doctors emphasize health-building practices such as weight bearing exercise and adequate vitamin D intake to prevent osteoporosis and the importance of eating a nutrient dense diet with healthy fats to help prevent heart disease. These practices can reduce the high future cost of preventable degenerative and chronic health conditions.

8. Reduce insurance costs.

Naturopathic medicine billing is far lower per patient than conventional medical billing. One study compared health care expenditures between complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) users and non-users, with CAM providers being defined as naturopathic doctors, chiropractors, acupuncturists, and licensed massage therapists. While CAM users had higher outpatient expenditures, they had lower inpatient and imaging expenditures. Overall, CAM users had a lower average expenditure than non-users during the one-year study, at \$3,797 versus \$4,153.¹

¹ Lind BK, Lafferty WE, Tyree PT, Diehr PK. Comparison of Health Care Expenditures Among Insured Users and Nonusers of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in Washington State: A Cost Minimization Analysis. *J Altern Complement Med.* 2010;16(4):411–7. doi: [10.1089/acm.2009.0261](https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2009.0261). Online access here: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3110809/>