



## **Naturopathic Medicine: Frequently Asked Questions**

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

*The AANP and the INM would like to acknowledge the [Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges \(AANMC\)](#) for its contributions to the content of this FAQ. The AANMC was established in 2001 to advance the naturopathic medical profession by actively supporting the academic efforts of accredited naturopathic medical schools.*

### **FAQ #4:**

#### **What is the difference between a licensed naturopathic doctor and an unlicensed naturopath?**

Licensed naturopathic doctors, sometimes referred to as naturopathic physicians, are regulated at the state level to practice naturopathic medicine. Naturopathic medical students attend [accredited](#), four-year, in-residence, naturopathic medical schools where they study biomedical sciences such as anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pathology, and pharmacology. Their medical education incorporates the latest advances in science and natural approaches to illness prevention and management. Students complete a minimum of 4,100 hours of class and clinical training, including over 1,200 hours of hands-on, supervised, clinical training.

Naturopathic doctors can order diagnostic tests such as blood tests, X-rays, MRIs, and, in some states, prescribe prescription drugs and hormones and perform minor surgery. According to the Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC) 2015 [survey](#) of alumni, 50 percent of naturopathic doctors practicing full-time self-report as primary care physicians, while 28 percent report working as natural health specialists. In addition, like conventional medical doctors (MDs), a growing number of naturopathic doctors choose to focus their practices in specialty areas. Specialty associations currently exist for [Endocrinology](#), [Environmental Medicine](#), [Gastroenterology](#), Intravenous Therapies, [Pediatrics](#), [Primary Care Medicine](#), and [Oncology](#).

A naturopathic doctor must pass rigorous professional board exams prior to being licensed or regulated in a state that regulates the practice of naturopathic medicine. State mandated regulatory bodies oversee standards of practice, complaints, and discipline for all licensed

jurisdictions. Licensed naturopathic doctors also carry malpractice insurance and maintain a commitment to lifelong learning through continuing education. These requirements are safeguards to ensure patients' rights to quality naturopathic care.

The exam required to qualify for naturopathic doctor licensure is administered by the [North American Board of Naturopathic Examiners \(NABNE\)](#). The [Naturopathic Physicians Licensing Examinations \(NPLEX\)](#) is a two-part examination. Only students and graduates from accredited or candidate naturopathic programs are eligible to sit for the NPLEX.

In some states with laws regulating naturopathic doctors, the use of the term "naturopath" or "naturopathic physician" by anyone other than a licensed naturopathic doctor is prohibited. However, not all states regulate naturopathic doctors and not all states that do protect the term "naturopath."

Therefore, unlicensed naturopaths can have varied levels of education and experience, often from a purely online or correspondence format. Such education is not [accredited](#) by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and does not qualify students to take the NPLEX examination or apply for licensure in any regulated jurisdiction in North America.

**Be aware that while the terms may be used interchangeably, they are not the same**

As a patient, you should also know that the terms "naturopathic doctor", "naturopathic physician" and "naturopath" are often used interchangeably by medical practitioners in other disciplines and the public, even though unlicensed naturopaths do not have the same training or privileges. Knowing the difference between licensed naturopathic doctors and unlicensed naturopaths can help you make informed decisions about which type of provider can best help you.

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