



Including Naturopathic Physicians in Medicare

Naturopathic Approaches to High-Cost Diseases



Naturopathic physicians (NDs) utilize various modalities to manage patients' care with the goal of addressing the underlying cause of disease. This is particularly helpful for seniors, who typically have multiple health problems. According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the most expensive conditions among older Americans are heart disease, cancer, and osteoarthritis. NDs address these chronic conditions through a variety of modalities such as nutrition, lifestyle counseling, botanical medicine, nutritional supplementation, acupuncture, physical medicine, and hydrotherapy.

Heart Disease

Lifestyle counseling is an important component of care that NDs use to improve patients' health and well-being and includes dietary recommendations (e.g., dietary intake, food sensitivities), exercise, and social/behavioral modifications. Lifestyle intervention programs similar to those recommended by NDs for patients with heart disease are proven to improve health outcomes and reduce the need for surgery.¹

NDs commonly utilize nutritional supplements for heart disease, including garlic, ginger, curcumin, fish oils (for anti-inflammatory properties), red yeast rice, CoQ10, hawthorn berry (for congestive heart failure), hibiscus (for hypertension and dyslipidemia),² and minerals like calcium/magnesium. These supplements support vasodilation, increase arterial blood flow, and support the function of the heart.

Cancer

Naturopathic modalities aim to prevent cancer, improve effectiveness of cancer treatments, and/or minimize the side effects of treatments, e.g., fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, nausea, weight loss, anxiety, and sleep issues.³ Recommended diets are typically high in antioxidants, including colorful fruits and vegetables. People who consume 7 servings of fruits and vegetables can reduce mortality risk by 42%.⁴

NDs utilize a broad array of modalities that are specific to the cancers they are addressing. This requires a skillful, trained selection of appropriate supplements. Common nutritional supplementations utilized by NDs for cancer include, but are not limited to, green tea (polyphenols that protect against cell damage), melatonin (slows tumor growth, particularly for reproductive cancers), curcumin (targets cancer cells), vitamin D, and selenium. Other techniques to support a patient may include acupuncture for pain management, relaxation techniques, biofeedback, yoga, tai chi, and exercise.

Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative chronic disease, and successful treatment is based on prevention, pain management, and decreasing inflammation. Naturopathic care for osteoarthritis includes lifestyle and social modifications, exercise, dietary and environmental considerations, nutritional supplementation, herbal medicine, homeopathy, hydrotherapy, and acupuncture. NDs typically recommend dietary changes that include, but are not limited to, a lower protein diet and avoidance of foods in the nightshade family, such as tomatoes and eggplant. NDs also review food tolerances. Movement and exercise is important to ensure flexibility of the joints and to increase oxygen and nutrients to cartilage. Common nutritional supplementations utilized by NDs include, but are not limited to, vitamin C (supports cartilage), zinc, selenium, bioflavonoid, glucosamine sulfate, ginger, boswelia (anti-inflammatory properties), topical application of capsicum, massage (for circulation), and acupuncture.⁵

REFERENCES

¹ Ornish D. Avoiding revascularization with lifestyle changes: the multicenter lifestyle demonstration project. *Am J Cardiol.* 1998;82(10B):72T–76T.

² Hudson T. Hibiscus, hawthorn and the heart: modern research supports the use of traditional plants. *Natural Med J.* 2011;3(7). <http://naturalmedicinejournal.com/journal/2011-07/hibiscus-hawthorn-and-heart>.

³ Mayo Clinic. Diseases and conditions. Alternative cancer treatments: 11 options to consider. www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cancer/in-depth/cancer-treatment/art-20047246

⁴ Oyebo O. Fruit and vegetable consumption and all-cause, cancer and CVD mortality: analysis of Health Survey for England data. *J Epidemiol Community Health.* 2014;doi:10.1136/jech-2013-203500.

⁵ Long L, Soeken K, Ernst E. Herbal medicines for the treatment of osteoarthritis: a systematic review. *Rheumatol.* 2001;40(7):779-793.