

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



HIGHLIGHTS

A naturopathic treatment approach for diabetes includes:

- Review of diet diary and/or blood sugar log
- Dietary guidance to strive for more balanced blood sugar throughout the day
- A thorough review of other systems impacted by diabetes, including the heart, kidney, liver, and brain
- Lifestyle counseling strategies to engage patients in their own disease management and encourage lifestyle improvement
- Preventative strategies to avoid disease worsening
- Herbs and/or nutritional supplements to correct nutritional deficiencies and/or support blood sugar management
- Consultation on medication management (including insulin)

FAQ #10:

How do naturopathic doctors treat patients with diabetes?

Licensed naturopathic doctors are trained in both conventional and integrative approaches to treating all types of diabetes, including types 1 and 2, gestational diabetes, and prediabetes.

Focusing on the whole person, naturopathic doctors take the time to identify and address the genetic, environmental and behavioral/lifestyle factors that play significant roles in diabetes. Lifestyle changes around diet and exercise are essential in the treatment of all types of diabetes. However, many patients have a difficult time making such changes. Advanced training in nutrition and counseling enables naturopathic doctors to be highly effective in engaging patients to take control of their own health.¹ Additionally, because they emphasize educating the patient, naturopathic doctors are often successful in helping individuals with diabetes to make and sustain shifts in nutrition and physical activity that can improve or reverse progression of the disease.²

Naturopathic doctors are also trained in the pharmacological treatments which are commonly prescribed by conventionally trained MDs. In some states, NDs have scope/authority for prescription pharmaceutical management, which may be necessary depending on the patient's condition. In many cases, NDs will work in conjunction with conventional endocrinologists and diabetes specialists to co-manage patient care.

Regardless of the type of diabetes, naturopathic treatment strategies aim to get a patient's blood sugar levels back within a healthy range.

Diabetes is one of the most common health conditions in the United States. On the rise for the last decade,³ today an estimated 30.3 million people—representing 9.4 percent of the population—live with the disease.⁴ There are several types of diabetes: gestational, which occurs when a woman develops diabetes during her pregnancy; type 1, caused by an auto-immune disease that destroys cells in the pancreas, and; type 2, caused by lifestyle choices and occurring in 90-95 percent of people with diabetes, including children. Prediabetes is a condition in which blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not yet high enough to be considered full-blown type 2 diabetes. Without lifestyle changes like those advised by naturopathic doctors, most people with prediabetes go on to develop type 2 diabetes.



Naturopathic Medicine uses natural substances to restore & regenerate



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Type 2 diabetes is related to insulin resistance, which means the body's cells are no longer able to get glucose out of the blood and use it properly. Therefore, glucose levels in the blood stay high. Over time, having glucose levels too high in your blood can cause serious health problems such as heart disease, nerve damage, eye problems, and more.

Regardless of the type of diabetes, naturopathic treatment strategies aim to get a patient's blood sugar levels back within a healthy range. For example, even though type 2 diabetes is caused by a number of factors, most of them are controllable, including diet, physical activity, stress, eating habits and behaviors, and obesity. Nutritional deficiencies, environmental toxins and hormonal imbalances can also contribute to insulin resistance, and require special training to evaluate. A naturopathic doctor explores all of these factors to determine which ones should be prioritized and how they can be modified.

A visit with a naturopathic doctor to address diabetes will include a comprehensive intake and physical exam, along with review of health history, diet, and lifestyle factors. Any recent lab work will be reviewed, and new labs will be ordered if needed.

Generally, a naturopathic treatment approach for diabetes includes a combination of:

- Review of diet diary and/or blood sugar log
- Dietary guidance to strive for more balanced blood sugar throughout the day
- A thorough review of other systems impacted by diabetes, including the heart, kidney, liver, and brain
- Lifestyle counseling strategies to engage patients in their own disease management and encourage lifestyle improvement
- Preventative strategies to avoid disease worsening
- Herbs and/or nutritional supplements to correct nutritional deficiencies and/or support blood sugar management
- Consultation on medication management (including insulin)

Following an initial appointment, a naturopathic doctor will determine which areas are the highest priority to address and which approaches are likely to be most effective. These will be used to create a personalized treatment plan.

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¹ 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 17, 2017 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0048549>

² Bradley R, Sherman KJ, Catz S, Calabrese C, Oberg EB, Jordan L, Grothaus L, Cherkin DC. Adjunctive naturopathic care for type 2 diabetes: Patient-reported and clinical outcomes after one year. BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine. 2012. 12:44. doi:10.1186/1472-6882-12-44

³ Klonoff DC. The increasing incidence of diabetes in the 21st century. J Diabetes Sci Technol. 2009;3(1):12. Accessed November 6, 2017: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2769839/>

⁴ <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/diabetes/overview/what-is-diabetes>