

# The Jean Hailes *Foundation* *for women's health*

## Fact sheet

### Natural Therapies and Complementary Medicine

#### What are natural therapies?

Naturopathy is an umbrella term that covers many different therapeutic disciplines or approaches. These disciplines are referred to as natural therapies and include:

- Herbal medicine
- Nutrition
- Acupuncture
- Homoeopathy
- Osteopathy
- Chiropractic
- Traditional Chinese medicine
- Aromatherapy
- Remedial therapy such as massage and kinesiology

Practitioners who practice as natural therapists may specialise in one area, for example they may be a herbalist or a homeopath. A natural therapist who uses a number of these approaches is referred to as a naturopath.

#### Complementary medicine

This term is used to suggest that any of the disciplines of healthcare, including western medicine, can be used together for the management of health complaints. This term has become more popular than 'alternative medicine' which suggests that natural therapies are an alternative to mainstream western medicine. Natural therapies are often referred to as complementary medicine, and ideally all forms of healthcare may be used together and complement each other.

Naturopathy is concerned with treating the whole person and the underlying cause rather than just dealing with the symptoms. This is why natural therapies are often called *holistic* medicine. The patient is viewed from independent physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and cultural aspects. To treat holistically requires that the individual patient's patterns of thought, behaviour, work, and culture are taken into consideration in assessing how these factors may have contributed to the health complaint. They are also considered in recommending treatment, which is ideally tailored to meet the individual's different needs and circumstances.

Naturopathy regards health as a positive state of physical and mental wellness. Rather than disease being diagnosed at the end stage, *illness* is detected at the earliest stage by looking for risk factors, examining the diet for deficiencies/inadequacies and looking for changes in the functioning of the body.

The Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health

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## Definitions of the different disciplines of natural therapy

**Herbal medicine** The use of herbs prescribed for the treatment of complaints. This is the oldest known form of medicine.

**Homeopathy** Works on the principle that 'like cures like'; i.e. a substance which can produce a certain set of symptoms in a healthy person, will cause similar symptoms to disappear in a sick person, when given in a highly diluted (homeopathic) form.

**Nutrition** Dietary advice, identifying potential food intolerances related to health problems and the use of nutritional supplements.

**Acupuncture** The stimulation of acupuncture needles inserted in specific points located on acupuncture channels to regulate the energy (*Qi*), which is transported around the body through these channels.

**Remedial therapy** The use of therapeutic massage for the treatment of muscle tension, tendon and ligament injuries. Massage techniques may include relaxation, sports massage, deep tissue, shiatsu, trigger point techniques and aromatherapy (using essential oils).

**Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)** The use of Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture and Chinese remedial therapy

**Osteopathy and chiropractic** Manipulative therapies based on the science of human mechanics. Often used for the treatment of spinal pain, but there is a strong belief that the structure of the spine greatly influences health. Chiropractic places chief importance on the integrity of the spine. The osteopath also emphasises the role that the soft tissue has on skeletal framework and general health of the body.

### Additional resources

"Alternative healing: What you should know (Your guide to complementary medicine and therapies)"

By Sarah Heinzman

McPhersons Printing Group 2004

The Australian Women's Weekly Health Series

### How to find a natural therapist

Australian Natural Therapists Association (ANTA)

Freecall: 1800 817 577

[www.anta.com.au](http://www.anta.com.au)

Australian Traditional Medicine Society (ATMS)

Ph: (02) 9809 6800

<http://www.atms.com.au>

National Herbalists Association of Australia

Ph: (02) 8765 0071

[www.nhaa.org.au](http://www.nhaa.org.au)

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational.  
It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your health practitioner.

### health tips

Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods, by eating plenty of vegetables, legumes, fruit and wholegrain cereals. Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives.

Try to include fish 3–5 times a week (this can include canned fish, such as salmon, sardines and tuna).

Take time out just for you.

Make pelvic floor exercises a life-long habit — even if you have no symptoms.

Be active on most, or all, days of the week: you don't have to do a 30 minute walk, 3x10 minutes is just as good!

3 serves of dairy each day for good bone health.