Naturopathy is a system of healing based on the premise that given the right diet, nutrients and lifestyle, the body will, on the whole, cure itself. The term “Vis medicatrix naturae”, the healing power of nature, denoting the body’s inherent ability to heal itself, is the underlying philosophy of natural medicine. In fact, the well-known inventor Thomas Edison said, “The doctor of the future will give no medicine, but will interest his patient in the care of the human frame, in diet and in the cause and prevention of disease”.

Years ago, naturopathy was viewed with suspicion and often termed “quackery” and often the training of naturopaths was of questionable quality. Modern naturopaths however, undergo extensive training – naturopathy is offered at both private natural medicine and universities. Naturopaths today, undergo between 3 – 5 years of study where they are trained in the modalities of nutrition, herbal medicine, homeopathy, massage and human sciences – anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pathology, pharmacology and symptomology and diagnosis. Having said this, there is still a wide variation between both standards of education and emphasis on modalities. As such, no two naturopaths practise in the same way – one naturopath may emphasise dietary change, while another may base their treatment on nutrients or herbal supplements and yet another may use a combination of all three.

Due to this wide variation, it can often be difficult to find a naturopath that suits you. There are three golden rules that I suggest when looking for a naturopath:

1. Are they covered by private medical insurance – this not only reduces the fees associated with a naturopathic consult, but also ensures that the naturopath you are seeing has done a recognized course of study.

2. How long have they been in practice? The test of time is never truer than in naturopathy. Experience is so very important and no amount of academic study can replace “front line” experience.

Running a modern naturopathic practice is hard work as it takes time to build up a viable business. A recent study by one of the major natural therapies’ associations showed that few naturopathic graduates last longer than 5 years in business. Your relationship with your naturopath may last your entire lifetime, so you want to be sure that the naturopath you select will be in practice for some time.

3. Personal recommendations – speak to friends, family members and colleagues about their experiences with naturopaths, whom they have been to and what type of results they achieved. Questions such as how regularly did you need to visit them, what additional costs were there, did they change your diet, what did the therapy involve – are all very important questions to ask. If you are someone who is not motivated to change your diet – then a naturopath who used dietary change may not be appropriate for you. On the flipside, if you are not interested in swallowing large amounts of supplements you may achieve better results with someone who concentrates on diet. Personal recommendations are by far and away the most effective way of ensuring that the naturopath you select is the most appropriate one for you.

Many naturopaths choose to specialise in specific areas of therapy while others choose to use a combination of therapies. A wide variety of different types of therapy can be employed by the naturopath in the treatment of an individual, including nutrition, botanical medicines, homeopathy, acupuncture, physical medicine, counselling and lifestyle modification. In their excellent book “Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine” Pizzorno and Murray briefly describe each of these therapies.

So, you want to see a naturopath but don’t know who to see or what to expect? In the first of a series of articles on Naturopathy, Kirsty Tassell explains what Naturopathy is, the techniques used and how to choose a practitioner appropriate for you.

Herbal or Botanical Medicine

Plants have been used as medicines since antiquity. With the advent of the pharmaceutical industry in this century, the popularity of herbal medicine declined (although 25 per cent of all prescription drugs contain ingredients isolated from plants). Currently there is a renaissance occurring in the appreciation of plants as medicinal agents. Technology now exists which allows for greater understanding of the manner in which herbs promote health and restore balance in disease. Naturopathic physicians are professionally trained herbalists and know both the historical uses of plants as well as modern pharmacological mechanisms.

Homeopathy

The term “homeopathy” is derived from the Greek word homeos, meaning similar, and pathos, meaning disease. Homeopathy is a system of medicine that treats a disease with a dilute, potentised agent, or drug, that will produce the same symptoms as the disease when given to a healthy individual, the fundamental principle being that like cures like. This principle was actually first recognised by Hippocrates, who noticed that herbs given in low doses tended to cure the same symptoms they produced when given in toxic doses. Homeopathic medicines are derived from a variety of plant, mineral and chemical substances.

Nutrition

Clinical nutrition, or the use of diet as a therapy, serves as the foundation of naturopathic medicine. There is an ever increasing body of knowledge that supports the use of whole foods and nutritional supplements in the maintenance of health and treatment of disease. Many common conditions can be treated effectively by dietary measures, including acne, arthritis, asthma, atherosclerosis, depression, diabetes (type II), eczema, gout, hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, premenstrual syndrome and ulcerative colitis.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese system of medicine involving the stimulation of certain specific points on the body to enhance the flow of vital energy (chi) along pathways called meridians. Acupuncture points can be stimulated by the insertion and withdrawing of needles, the application of...
adequate SLEEP?

Sleep is crucial to a healthy body functioning. However, in today’s fast paced world, are we obtaining adequate sleep? And just how much sleep is adequate?

» I use the word “obtain” purposefully when referring to sleep. Adequate sleep is a goal to be achieved just like other health related goals. We exercise to get ‘in shape’, train to perfect our technique, eat well to look good and attain overall good health. Adequate sleep is another vital component of every martial artist’s training... both physically and mentally.

» It is obvious to us that sleep is required to reach our physical goals. We need sleep to rest and repair our bodies, including our brains. Sleep actually increases the functioning of the immune system, which is why we require ample sleep when fighting off a cold or flu. Of course it is advisable that we obtain adequate sleep all the time to decrease the likelihood of the onset of such infections.

» The brain requires sleep, the same as the rest of the body, for physiological processes that rejuvenate it. For the brain, this means restoring neurons, replenishing neurotransmitters, increasing the production of some brain proteins and some hormones. This also includes the hormones controlling growth so children require more sleep than adults and this sleep is crucial for their growth. Sleep also plays a part in the brain’s efficiency in controlling energy balance.

» In addition to these physiological needs for sleep, the brain requires sleep for a number of other vital tasks. Adequate sleep increases our ability to learn, as well as our ability to process what we have learned and retain it. This applies to both mental learning and physical learning. Furthermore, sleep not only increases our memory, but also helps delete unneeded memories.

» So how much sleep is adequate?

Generally, about 7-8 hours of sleep per 24 hours is recommended for healthy adults. According to researchers, increases in exercise do not increase the amount of sleep required. However, every person is unique and an individual’s need may vary from the ‘norm’. You may be “OK” with 6 hours of sleep but be sure not to sacrifice this vital component of your health. You will enjoy your health and your body much more if you work at obtaining the optimal amount of this nutrient.

martial arts for BACK PAIN

Is back pain keeping you from pursuing martial arts the way you would like? Are you afraid of aggravating your back pain by working out too hard? New research and treatment programs may help you change your mind. According to Health magazine, “each year 65 million people experience back pain which limits their activity. It is the second most common reason for doctor visits, behind colds and flu. An astounding four out of five adults are stricken with back pain some time in their life”. But relief may be in sight. According to research, the ‘best medicine’ may actually be strenuous workout. And this goes especially for people who experience chronic back pain, defined as back pain that lasts more than two months.

When we suffer from back pain, our natural tendency is to limit movement, so it is a challenge to re-interpret the body’s message that seems to be telling us “don’t move!” However a strenuous exercise regime can help to strengthen and stretch back muscles making them more limber and stronger. Exercise enhances blood flow to muscles and may speed healing, as well as ease muscle cramps that are often the cause of back pain. Too often people get caught up in playing the victim when they experience a sore back. They fear the injury so much they tend to stay still as often and for as long as possible. This however is not a long-term solution. Martial arts with its combination of cardiovascular exercise, stretching and toning, may very well be the perfect activity for those previously suffering from back pain. This may be great news for those whose involvement in the martial arts has been curtailed by back pain or for those who have not started for this reason. Of course you should always consult your doctor before beginning or changing your exercise program. Back pain doesn’t have to limit you in reaching all your martial arts goals.

Kirsty Tassell is an Adelaide naturopath with over 13 years experience. She holds a Bachelor of Health Science in Naturopathy, a Post Graduate Diploma in Medical Phytotherapy and is currently undergoing a Masters in Acupuncture. She runs a successful Natural Medical Phytotherapy and is currently undergoing a Science in Naturopathy, a Post Graduate Diploma in Counselling and lifestyle modification techniques are essential to the naturopathic physician. A naturopath is a holistic-minded physician formally trained in the following counselling areas:

- Interviewing and responding skills, active listening, assessing body language and other contact skills necessary for the therapeutic relationship;
- Recognising and understanding prevalent psychological issues including developmental problems, abnormal behaviour, addictions, stress, sexuality, etc.;
- Various treatment measures including hypnosis and guided imagery, counselling techniques, correcting underlying organic factors and family therapy.

Physical Medicine

Physical medicine refers to the use of physical measures in the treatment of an individual. This includes the use of ultrasound, diathermy and other electromagnetic techniques, therapeutic exercise, massage, joint mobilisation (manipulation) and immobilisation techniques, and hydrotherapy.

Counselling And Lifestyle Modification

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heat (moxibustion), massage, laser, electric 1 means, or a combination of these methods. Traditional Chinese acupuncture implies a very specific acupuncture technique and knowledge of the oriental system of medicine including yin and yang, the five elements, acupuncture points and meridians, as well as a method of diagnosis and differentiation of syndromes quite different from that of western medicine.