

The Principles of Naturopathic Medicine

Primum non nocere, “First, do no harm.”

All physicians pledge to abide by this principle. For naturopathic medicine it means to utilize the least harmful, least invasive, most appropriate methods in re-establishing or regaining health. Naturopathic physicians prefer the use of non-invasive treatments, where possible, and offer complementary care to minimize any risks of harmful side effects when invasive or potentially toxic treatments are required.

Vis medicatrix naturae, “Use the healing power of Nature.”

Our bodies normally have the ability to resist change, to adapt and to maintain health (i.e. homeostasis, proper immune system function). This ability can be enhanced with the appropriate use of natural substances (diet, nutritional supplements and botanicals) and other therapies that assist the body in maintaining and restoring health such as yoga, massage and hydrotherapy).

Tolle causam, “Identify and treat the cause.”

Although naturopathic medicine is concerned with the treatment of symptoms, its primary focus is the long-term health of the patient. Conventional medications or botanicals often successfully treat symptoms, but it is the identification and treatment of the underlying cause of an illness through a holistic approach that ultimately leads to restoration and maintenance of health.

Docere, “The doctor is a teacher.”

Naturopathic medicine stresses the education of patients about their bodies (in health and disease) and how to attain and maintain health. In this spirit, it’s important to educate patients about all of the potential health care options available to them—including referrals to medical doctors, specialists and other health care providers—thereby empowering them to make informed decisions appropriate for their health.

Cura totem hominem, “Treat the whole person.”

Naturopathic medicine embraces each patient as a whole person—body, mind and spirit. Modern medicine has evolved into a vast array of subspecialties, which has enabled it to accomplish many great feats. Nevertheless, there is a vital role for caregivers that acknowledge both the benefits of modern medical technology and the complex role of human relationships, emotions, orientations, and spiritual values.

Praeventum, “Prevention.”

The majority of the most prevalent debilitating diseases in America, such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, arthritis, and osteoporosis, are preventable. Prevention requires education about the causes of and contributing factors to these and other diseases. It also involves the identification of a disease process at its earliest stages by identifying those patients at risk and encouraging appropriate screening tests.



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Some of the most common recommendations being:

- Fasting glucose levels for those at risk for diabetes
- Mammography for women with a family history of breast cancer
- DEXA for women with a family history of osteoporosis
- Fasting lipid levels and cardiac work-up for individuals with a family history of heart disease
- Colonoscopy for individuals with a family history of colon cancer

Prevention also involves helping people make the changes in their lives necessary to minimize or eliminate their risks for the development and/or progression of disease.

Dr. Bourgon believes that naturopathic medicine is not “an alternative” to conventional medicine; it is a complement to it. She is not opposed to pharmaceutical drugs, surgery, and/or other conventional treatments when these treatments are appropriate and she refers to medical doctors (and other health care providers) for such treatment. She frequently works adjunctively with the traditional community, offering complementary care to patients receiving such conventional medical treatment, to facilitate the efficacy of the treatment and minimize the side effects.

Ultimately she believes that the needs of patients can be met best by utilizing all modalities available at the present time in the treatment of illness and the maintenance of health. This, she believes, is the future of medicine.

What is a naturopathic physician?

A naturopathic doctor is a fully accredited, licensed primary care physician who is trained to diagnose and treat illness and disease.

How are naturopathic physicians educated and trained?

Naturopathic physicians must attend one of the post-graduate schools offering a doctorate in naturopathic medicine, which involves four years of fully accredited medical and clinical education and training. Included in the training are diagnostic technology (lab work, X-ray, radiography), pharmaceutical drugs, natural therapeutics, (i.e. herbs, manipulation and hydrotherapy) and counseling. A nationally recognized exam must be successfully completed at the end of those four years in order to be eligible for licensure.

Does insurance cover naturopathic physician visits?

Yes, several insurance companies do cover naturopathic services. However, some do not. It is best that you contact your individual insurance carrier prior to your visit to find out exactly what your policy covers. Medicaid and Medicare do not cover naturopathic services at this time.

What can I expect at a visit?

You begin your visit with an in-depth interview. You may have a physical exam. Lab work or other diagnostic studies may be ordered, and records may be requested from other health care providers. You may be asked to return for a second visit to review these diagnostic studies. A treatment plan is developed and is discussed with you. The plan may include dietary recommendations, nutritional supplements, lifestyle changes, botanical medicine, a pharmaceutical prescription, a referral to another health care provider (e.g. a medical doctor, a specialist, counselor, chiropractor, acupuncturist, massage therapist, or other health care provider), instructions for home hydrotherapy treatments, and an exercise recommendation. Your care is followed at appropriate intervals via return appointments.

Do I have to choose between conventional medicine and naturopathic medicine?

No. Dr. Bourgon believes that the best health care is received when many modalities are offered and an individual is given the option to choose the treatment that is best for him or her. Dr. Bourgon often works in conjunction with other health care providers to coordinate the best possible care for her patients.



Dr. Roberta Bourgon is available to see patients at Billings Clinic. To schedule an appointment, call 238-2501 or 1-800-332-7156.

Dr. Bourgon has a bachelor of science degree from the University of British Columbia and a doctorate of naturopathic medicine from Bastyr University in Washington. She has been practicing naturopathic medicine in the Billings community since 1996.