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health & wellness » alternatives

Natural Medicine

Understanding alternative methods one puzzle piece at a time.

Purchasing vitamins, supplements and herbs can be an overwhelming experience. Trying to figure out what is the right supplement, herb, remedy or powder can be daunting. It is often confusing to differentiate and decide what is best for us. Having a basic understanding can be very helpful, so here is a primer about natural medicine.

Homeopathy is a form of medicine in which the patient is treated with diluted substances to trigger the body's natural healing system. It is based on the principle of treating health symptoms with the same substance that causes the symptoms. For example, treating dust and mold allergies with much smaller and diluted amounts of the dust and mold, when made into a homeopathic remedy, can actually reduce "or balance" the same symptoms.

Homeopathic remedies are used in "ultra-high dilutions" that make them non-toxic. The principle of treating "like with like" is traced back to Hippocrates, but in its current form, homeopathy has been widely used worldwide for more than 200 years.

Traditional Chinese medicine, which includes acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine, has been used for centuries. Through working with the body's "life force or qi energy," the goal of TCM is to bring the body to a healthy state of balance. Chinese herbal medicine is comprised of a variety of individual herbs (anywhere from two to 20) that create a "formula." Some of the herbs are considered the main herbs and others the "ancillary or support" herbs. There are standardized (or premade) herbal formulas that are widely available or customized formulas that are only available through a visit to an acupuncturist or herbalist.

Botanical medicine is based on the premise that plants have medicinal qualities. Botanical/herbal medicine uses a plant's seeds, roots, leaves, bark or flowers for medicinal purposes. Many of our pharmaceutical medicines have origins in herbal medicine. All plants produce chemical compounds, some of which are common to all plants, and others specific to individual plants. It is these chemical

compounds that have medicinal benefit. Herbal remedies are very common throughout Europe and the United States.

Vitamins are "organic compounds that are needed by the body for growth and activity by the body." Vitamins are not created in the body. They

are found in food derived from plants and animals. Vitamins are either water-soluble (dissolve in water and are excreted from the body via urine or sweat) or fat-soluble (stored in fat in the body and not excreted through water). There are 13 essential vitamins that are needed for the body to function. There are recommended daily doses (RDA) and tolerable upper intake levels (TL). The FDA uses the daily value measurement

(DV), which is found on labels.

Although many of these medicines are widely available in health food stores, drug stores and grocery stores, there is a benefit to seeking the expertise of a trained professional such as a naturopathic doctor.

While **naturopathic medicine** can often integrate traditional, such as clinical and laboratory diagnostic testing, it most often relies on natural approaches to treatment. Naturopathic doctors attend a four-year post-undergraduate-level school in which they study all basic sciences and take rigorous board exams. Chiropractors and acupuncturists also have extensive training in natural medicine. In addition, many MDs and DOs seek additional and specialized training in complementary medicine approaches to health and well being.

Try these websites to find local resources:

- Michigan Association of Naturopathic Doctors: www.michnd.org
- Michigan Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine: www.michiganacupuncture.org
- Michigan Association of Chiropractors: www.chiromich.com □

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