

CAM Concepts

Naturopathic Concept of Nutritional Supplementation

(Disclaimer: This mini-review is intended to explain this naturopathic theory to physicians and does not discuss the specific evidence for or against the theoretical concept.

Theory

Naturopathic doctors (ND) commonly utilize high doses of nutritional supplements in the treatment of many diseases. Nutritional supplements include single and combination vitamins, minerals, amino acids, essential fatty acids, enzymes, plant and animal extracts, and some hormones. These agents are usually administered orally, but some of them can also be administered by injection, (IM such as vitamin B-12 or IV such as vitamin C), spray (such as quercetin), sub-lingual (such as vitamin B-12), transdermal (such as natural progesterone cream), or rectal irrigation (such as butyric acid).

The theoretical basis for the use of nutritional supplementation is two-fold. First, if a person is assessed to be deficient in a certain nutrient either by laboratory testing or by clinical evaluation, supplementation can help to correct the deficiency. Secondly, administering high doses of specific nutrients can promote a healing response by the body and facilitate improvement or cure of a disease process. There is a growing body of good scientific evidence supporting the use of certain nutrients in treating disease, e.g. Glucosamine sulfate for osteoarthritis, niacin for hyperlipidemia, fish oil for coronary artery disease prevention as well as other different inflammatory conditions *e.g. IBD, RA, atopic dermatitis*. Other examples with less good evidence are riboflavin for migraine headaches, DHEA for SLE and other auto-immune diseases, and vitamin B-6 for PMS.

Practical Application

The utilization of nutritional supplementation will be applied after the ND has made a diagnosis and formed an assessment of the underlying causes of the disease process. Then, as part of a comprehensive therapeutic plan that will likely include several different modalities, specific nutritional supplements will be recommended. An example of this approach is a patient with ulcerative colitis. In assessing the underlying causes, the ND theorizes that stress, food sensitivities, dysbiosis (a sub-optimal balance of gut flora), and nutrient deficiencies in essential fatty acids are considered to be factors in this situation. Stress reduction strategies, specific food eliminations, oral administration of probiotic agents, and high doses of essential fatty acids such as cod liver oil are likely to be recommended.

Another example is migraine headaches. Often, an ND will identify both food triggers and food sensitivities as factors in this condition, along with musculoskeletal dysfunction, stress, and hormonal factors. These will all be addressed by food elimination diets, soft or osseus tissue manipulation, stress reduction techniques, hormone balancing therapies, and very commonly high doses of riboflavin, magnesium, butterbur, and/or feverfew. ----
