

CAM Concepts

CAM Concept of Prevention

(Disclaimer: This mini-review is intended to explain this naturopathic concept and is not intended to discuss the evidence supporting it)

(Naturopathy)

Theory

Naturopathic physicians believe that health is more than the absence of disease. Health as defined by naturopathy is a state of optimal function and balance of an individual's body, mind, and spirit. The concept of prevention in naturopathic medicine goes beyond the conventional definition of screening to detect disease. Prevention in naturopathic medicine is a proactive approach to achieving, maintaining, or restoring a state of optimal health.

Practical application

This concept of prevention is applied by evaluating all the possible predisposing risk factors for disease in each individual situation. These might include genetic, behavioral, environmental, social, or other factors that might predispose a patient to be vulnerable to a particular disease. Once these factors have been evaluated, recommendations might be given to the patient with the intent of creating behavior change where modifiable factors have been identified, and utilizing therapies that may mitigate the impacts of non-modifiable risk factors. An example will illustrate this approach:

A 40 year old male patient comes in for a routine examination. During the interview it is determined that he has several male relatives who have been diagnosed with prostate cancer. In addition to a discussion about regular examinations and the pros/cons of PSA screening, the ND reviews the current evidence that dietary fish oil, garlic, lycopene, selenium, and soy milk may reduce the risk of prostate cancer. Reducing saturated fat intake, especially red meats, will also reduce the risk. In addition, supplementation of beta-carotene, vitamin D, selenium, and vitamin E may reduce the risk of prostate cancer in certain situations. The ND will also counsel the patient to maintain an ideal weight through exercise and nutrition. The ND may recommend supplements containing some of the potentially preventive nutrients. Finally, the ND will assess and address other potential factors impacting health, such as mental, emotional, spiritual, environmental and social issues.