

Know what you need and want!

Get clarity about what you are looking for and then evaluate a doctor accordingly. You may be looking for more understanding about what you can modify in your lifestyle to help improve a particular condition. You may be looking for a family doctor that just refills your one prescription. You may have just heard of naturopathic medicine and you want to check it out. You may want to refine and individualize the vitamins you take. Or maybe you need a second opinion on a chronic condition.

If you are looking for a doctor who will be on your team long-term, you will also need to consider how closely the doctor's philosophy fits your own. You can sit down with all of the 200 Naturopathic Doctors in this province and they will agree philosophically with each other for the most part, but how they do things and what they style their practices around will be different. So it pays to have a sense of how the doctor approaches patients to see if it matches what you're looking for in a provider. Some NDs only use nutritional supplementation, some love herbal medicine or use homeopathy exclusively. Some have a practice style that hasn't changed over the course of their practice, and some docs are learning new approaches often.

A naturopathic doctor is trained to be a family doctor, but in this province there are restrictions on practice that do not allow an ND to refill your pharmaceutical prescriptions. So if you have several prescriptions that you feel are essential to your health plan, you will still need a doctor with drug prescribing rights.

If you are concerned about a particular condition, you may want an ND that has that as an interest area. However, you should be aware that most of the time, a condition has to be considered in the larger context. For example, if you have rheumatoid arthritis, you don't just want someone who has "greener" options for pain control. You want to have someone who can relate your rheumatoid arthritis to the other things that are going on in your life and lifestyle.

Maybe you are mostly healthy, but you really like natural health care and you want someone to consult as needed.

Or maybe you have a team of doctors and specialists, but you would like another opinion about how your health could be improved using natural medicines.

In any case, the more specific you are about what you are looking for, the easier it is to ask a provider about whether they can fill that need.

Ask around for references.

Talk to your friends, family members and co-workers. Find out who they see and how happy they are with the care. I've always found that people find me mostly by word of mouth. Once they've heard the same suggestion from more than 2 people, they find their way to Resonance! The people around you often have similar philosophies and views to yours, so what suits them often suits you! It cracks us up in the office when there are spontaneous meetings between friends in our waiting room where they both exclaim "I didn't know you came here too!". So, you could probably save yourself some time by talking to people that you know for a recommendation.



Call a person's office to speak to the doctor.

Often doctors' offices don't let you speak to the doctor directly, but they may offer a visit that lets you figure out if you would suit each other. That's what we do. We offer a Pre-First Office Call consult that lets you get a sense of myself and Resonance Wellness to see if our office is right for you.

If there is no way to speak to the doctor directly, you may want to see what people are saying about the doctor on online rating sites. It's been my experience that satisfied reviews are less likely to be posted than negative ones, so if you see lots of positive reviews it holds good weight. Searching for the doctors name on your web browser also can show you what that doctor is up to and what the general experience with the doctor is. I remember the first time I had someone show up after they had seen an online review of Resonance Wellness. I didn't even know that was a thing until then! But in recent years, this has become another place to evaluate if a practice will suit you or not.

Find out what the doctor's credentials are.

For many years in Alberta, Naturopathic Doctors had no regulation pertaining to their practice (This was not for lack of trying, it was going at the speed of the government!). As a result, there were many people that claimed to be practicing Naturopathic Medicine that did not have the training that is required by regulated provinces and states. An ND in Alberta should be registered with the College of Naturopathic Doctors of Alberta (www.cnda.net). Any disciplinary actions will show on the record, as well as years in practice and practice details. NDs may have further credentials related to an interest area. For instance, I am Board Certified in Anthroposophic Medicine, and am a member of several other associations in my interest areas. I also have further training in certain Advanced Skills practices, and modalities that my colleagues may or may not have.

Check with the provider of your insurance plan about what it covers.

Naturopathic care is fee for service. Office time is the most highly covered, followed by lab testing. Supplements are not included for most plans unless you have a Health Spending Account (HSA) that allows for it.

In my practice, I strive for cost and time-efficient care. I'm a busy person just like most of us are, and I always formulate plans that I think have the most "bang" for the buck and for the effort that you'll have to put in.

Look for a good communicator.

You should feel as though you can communicate to your doctor everything that is on your mind. You should also feel as though the doctor listens carefully and understands what is needed to support you (Don't forget to consult "How to Be a Great Patient" to see how your communication effort can help!).

You don't want to walk away from an appointment feeling like your questions haven't been answered, or that you are unsure of the next steps. In naturopathic care, we book more time with each individual so that we can sit with you, thoroughly discuss the elements that are affecting your condition, and explain how a particular course of action might help. You want a doctor that takes the time to listen to your concerns and questions and develops a relationship with you. One of the things I love most in my practice is how I have often been involved in the care of an individual and their family members for so many years, that I become part of that family, having been there through births and deaths, health and disease.

Your doctor should also work together with the other health professionals on your team and communicate about what pieces they can bring to your care, keeping everyone in the loop. Your doctor should also always encourage you to seek additional opinions and question their



opinion as necessary. A doctor's ego should not come between you and your best care. All doctors will make mistakes and miss things, so if you think something is being missed, ask about it.

Look into after-care hours, after hours contact information and emergency treatment protocols.

Make sure you can get the proper care you need in case of an emergency. I have been primary care to many of my patients for years, and I have carried a pager since day 1. I'd rather patients call me for 5 minutes and talk to me first about what's going on before waiting at the hospital to be told it is nothing. If you're a patient that needs reassurance sometimes, then find someone who you can get a hold of.

Check and see if your doctor's approach to healing is consistent with your own views and philosophies.

In naturopathic care, there is an underlying philosophy that states that the body will heal itself if given the right opportunities and support. This has also become known as a "functional medicine" approach. We aim to find and treat the underlying causes of chronic conditions, not just symptoms. So if you are just worried about suppressing a symptom and not really doing what needs to be done to heal the complaint, and ND may not be for you. But if you love the idea of seeing your health as a big picture, then it will be a valuable addition for you. Staying open minded can be really important when you add in a type of health care with which you have no personal history.

**I hope this overview can help clarify what you need to consider when choosing a provider!
Wherever your search leads you, may you find the path to your best health and your best life.**