
Working with a Functional Medicine Practitioner

Functional medicine practitioners promote wellness by focusing on the fundamental underlying factors that influence every patient's experience of health and disease.

Why Do We Need Functional Medicine?

Functional medicine addresses the whole person, not just an isolated set of symptoms. Functional medicine practitioners spend more time with their patients, listening to their histories and looking at the interactions between environmental, lifestyle, and genetic factors that influence health.

The functional medicine practitioner will consider multiple factors, including:

- **Environmental inputs:** The air you breathe and the water you drink, the diet you eat, the quality of the food available to you, your level of physical activity, and toxic exposures or traumas you have experienced affect your health and well-being.
- **Mind-body connections:** Psychological, spiritual, and social factors can all have a profound influence on your health. Considering these areas helps the functional medicine practitioner see your health in the context of you as a whole person, not just your physical symptoms.
- **Genetic makeup:** Although individual genes may make you more susceptible to some diseases, your DNA is not an unchanging blueprint for your life. Emerging research shows that your genes may be influenced by your environment, as well as your experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. That means it is possible to change the way genes are activated and expressed.

By understanding the genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors unique to each person, a functional medicine practitioner can identify which bodily processes are affected. Some occur at the cellular level and involve how cells function, repair, and maintain themselves. Others are related to how your body processes and uses nutrients. These processes include:

- How your body rids itself of toxins
- Regulation of hormones and neurotransmitters (nerve messengers)
- Immune system function

- Inflammatory responses
- Digestion and absorption of nutrients and the health of the digestive tract
- Structural integrity
- Psychological and spiritual balance
- How you produce energy

Any of these bodily processes can become imbalanced or disrupted, which can cause symptoms and accelerate disease.

A Comprehensive Approach to Treatment

The good news is that most imbalances can be addressed to restore or substantially improve a person's health.

- **Prevention is key.** Nearly every complex, chronic disease is preceded by long-term disturbances in function that can be identified relatively early on and effectively managed.
- **Changing how the systems function can have a major impact on health.** The functional medicine practitioner examines a wide array of available interventions and customizes a treatment plan, including those with the most impact on your health.
- **Functional medicine expands the clinician's tool kit.** Treatments may include combinations of drugs, botanical medicines, nutritional supplements, therapeutic diets, or detoxification programs. They may also include counseling on lifestyle, exercise, or stress-management techniques.
- **The patient becomes a partner.** As a patient, you become an active partner with your functional medicine practitioner. Such a partnership allows you to be in charge of improving your health and changing the outcome of disease.