

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.

The Functional Medicine Approach to Assessment

The Institute for Functional Medicine teaches practitioners how to assess the patient's fundamental clinical imbalances through careful history taking, physical examination, and laboratory testing. The functional medicine practitioner will consider multiple factors, including:

- ◆ **Environmental inputs** – The air you breathe and the water you drink, the particular diet you eat, the quality of the food available to you, your level of physical exercise, and toxic exposures or traumas you have experienced all affect your health.
- ◆ **Mind-body connections** – Psychological, spiritual, and social factors all can 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 everything in your environment, as well as your experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. That means it is possible to change the way genes are activated and expressed.

Through assessment of these underlying causes and triggers of dysfunction, the functional medicine practitioner is able to understand how key processes are affected. These are the body's processes that keep you alive. Some occur at the cellular level and involve how cells function, repair, and maintain themselves. These processes are related to larger functions, such as:

- how your body rids itself of toxins
- regulation of hormones and neurotransmitters
- immune system function
- inflammatory responses
- digestion and absorption of nutrients and the health of the digestive tract
- structural integrity
- psychological and spiritual equilibrium
- how you produce energy

All of these processes are influenced by both environmental factors and your genetic make-up; when they are disturbed or imbalanced, they lead to symptoms, which can lead to disease if effective interventions are not applied.

A Comprehensive Approach to Treatment

Most imbalances in functionality can be addressed; some can be completely restored to optimum function, and others can be substantially improved.

- ◆ **Prevention is paramount.** Virtually every complex, chronic disease is preceded by long-term disturbances in functionality that can be identified and effectively managed.
- ◆ **Changing how the systems function can have a major impact on the patient's health.** The functional medicine practitioner examines a wide array of available interventions and customizes a treatment plan including those with the most impact on underlying functionality.
- ◆ **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. This allows you to really be in charge of improving your own health and changing the outcome of disease.

The Institute for Functional Medicine is a nonprofit educational organization
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