



Why Functional Medicine?



“Functional medicine is a complete rethinking of health and disease, based on understanding the whole body. It seeks to identify and take care of the root causes of disease. It is a shift from medicine by symptoms to medicine by cause.”

Health care is a hot topic right now. How do we keep our immune system strong? How do we implement healthy eating? Who do we trust to help us to navigate our health?

It is important for all of us to have a conceptual knowledge of the type of healthcare/lifestyle philosophy we want to follow. Consider these key questions.

1. What does “healthy” mean to you?
2. Which aspects of lifestyle do you find most important for you?
3. How will you incorporate a health strategy in your day-to-day life?

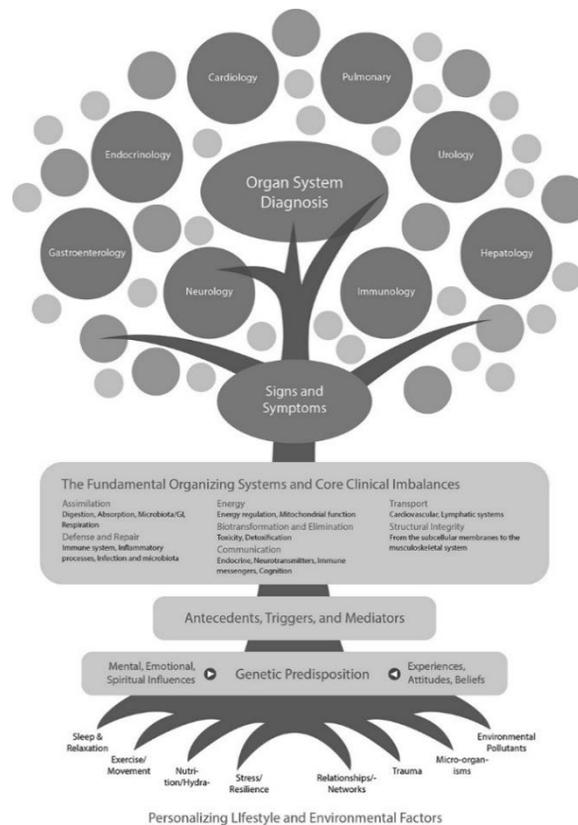
In general, the path to becoming and staying healthy is a simple one: eat nutritious food, rest adequately, move your body, find ways to deal with stress in multiple appropriate ways, and do what gives positive meaning to your life.

This can be achieved with the right guidance.

Living through COVID has offered many of us the opportunity to take a closer look at our health choices. This would be an opportune time to explore an approach to health called “functional medicine,” which views the body as a tree, and how we feel as leaves on that tree.

How we move, the food we eat, the liquids we drink, the pollution and barrage of chemicals we are exposed to, how we sleep and deal with stress all can be viewed as the roots of the tree creating health (or disease) throughout the tree.

If the tree gets poor nutrition from the soil and is over-watered receiving little sunlight, it will not thrive. Similarly, the human body has core requirements for vitality.



Courtesy of IFM – Institute Functional Medicine

Understanding Functional Medicine

Functional medicine looks at the different "functions" serving the body as a whole. Some of these functions are cellular communication, defense, repair, assimilation of nutrition and elimination. Disruptions in these functions affect the system as a whole, creating physical symptoms which are your body's way of communicating to you that core functions are compromised.

Functional medicine encourages you to address the **"root cause"** upstream from the symptoms. Listen to the symptoms rather than just suppressing them, and you will be on your way to creating a healthy life.

For example, which of the following choices makes the most sense?

If you are sitting on hot coals, you can take ibuprofen to decrease the pain, or you can remove the hot coals from your chair.

Similarly, if you have a headache you can take a pain reliever and the headache is resolved for the moment. You have treated the symptom successfully, but it will return unless you have addressed the "root cause."

Root causes may include:

- You try to survive on four hours of sleep a night.
- You never drink water, only soda.
- You fell and hit your head.

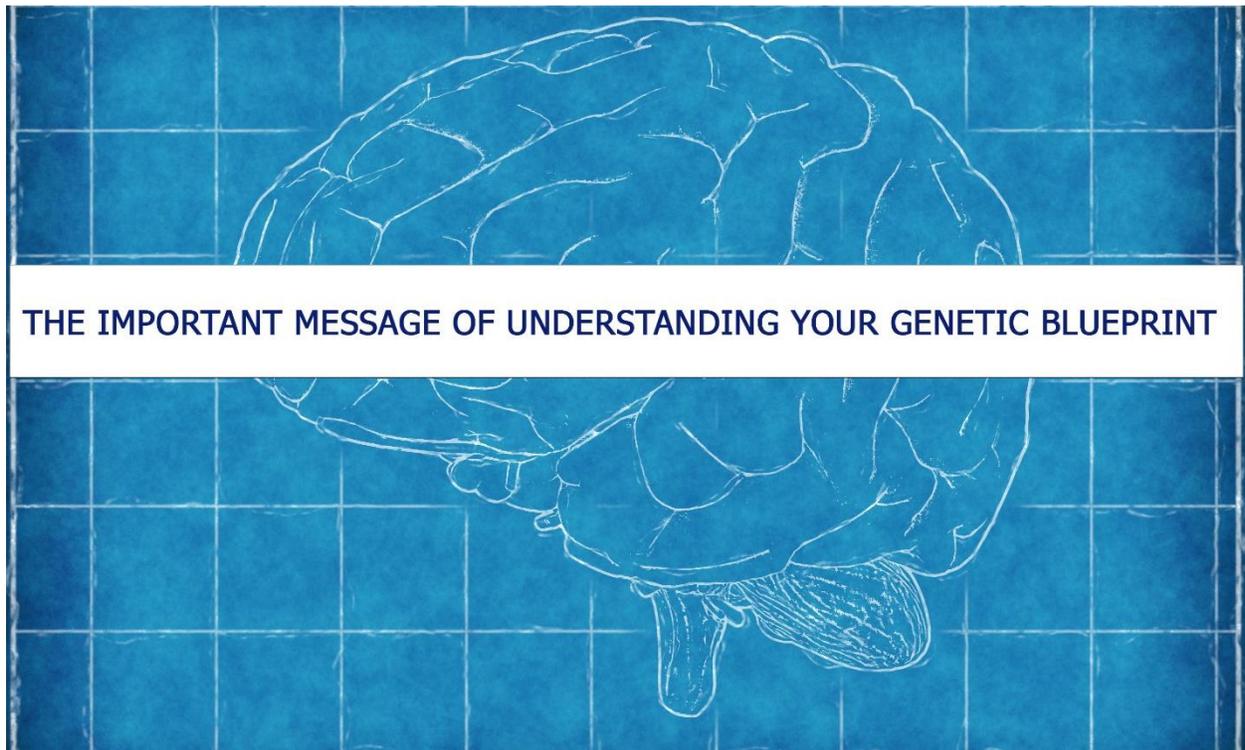
Each of these needs to be addressed according to that **root cause** to avoid further pain.

Understanding this interconnectedness has an added benefit. By focusing on the headache symptom and deciding to drink more water and less soda, you will help your body overall, improving all the functions. Thus, you may experience less anxiety and sleep better. Even small changes can provide significant results.

The primary lifestyle areas to address are:

- Sleep/relaxation
- Exercise/movement
- Nutrition
- Relationships
- Stress management

Always refer to these key areas when your health is compromised, as they will remind you where improvements can start.



You are born with a set of genes that endow you with a blueprint of what can happen with your health, but this is not fixed. You do not have to get the diabetes that everyone in your family has. This genetic material has to be read and interpreted. This function is strongly affected by the environment in which you bathe those genes. So control that environment!

Your body receives information from the food you eat, how much you exercise, how much you sleep or how upset you get over life's challenges. To put it another way, the DNA in your genes is like a computer's hard drive which is packed with programs. It is the information from the environment that determines which programs are going to be run and at what time.

Your genes load the gun, but your environment pulls the trigger!

Your body is not a machine to be pushed to the limit of physical endurance. Your health will ultimately be compromised if you survive on processed foods, if you don't manage your stress, or neglect to get restorative sleep.

You have the power to make choices; choices which reap consequences.

Awareness is vital to begin your journey to vibrant health!

I want to share this important information from the The Institute for Functional Medicine



THE INSTITUTE FOR
FUNCTIONAL
MEDICINE®

Working with a Functional Medicine Practitioner

When you visit a Functional Medicine practitioner, you can expect to spend a lot more time with them than you would with a conventional provider. You can also expect to do a lot of talking, as a big part of Functional Medicine is exploring your detailed personal and family history, the circumstances around your first symptoms, and the experiences you may have had with other health care providers.

The Institute for Functional Medicine teaches practitioners how to uncover the underlying causes of your health problems through careful history taking, physical examination, and laboratory testing:

- In addition to doing a lot of talking about your history, the practitioner will ask about your mental well-being, spiritual health, and social factors. Considering these areas helps the Functional Medicine practitioner see your health in the context of you as a whole person, not just in terms of your physical symptoms.
- The Functional Medicine provider may do a detailed examination of your body to see if there are any visible signs that provide clues to what is going on under the surface.
- They may also suggest that you submit samples for laboratory testing; some of these tests are the same ones used by conventional clinicians, but others are specialized tests that can help determine the causes of your illness. This might include genetic testing, which can show if the genes you inherited from your parents may make you more susceptible to certain types of health problems.

A Comprehensive Approach to Treatment

Once the practitioner has all the results from your tests, they will ask for your help in designing a treatment plan. The good news is that most health issues can be successfully treated as long as the right causes are identified. Some people can be completely restored to optimum function, while others can see substantial improvement in their condition. You can also take steps to help prevent your disease from worsening.

The treatment plan you help design will usually include making some changes in your lifestyle: what you eat, your physical activity, how you deal with stress, your exposure to potentially toxic substances, and other factors. The point of these changes is that your genetic makeup, the genes that you inherited from your parents, are designed to work well in a specific environment. Sometimes, when genes are exposed to the wrong environment, they don't work as they should, and this can lead to health problems. The good news is that, although individual genes may make you more susceptible to some diseases, 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 work in your body. So, changing your environment can make the genes work the way they were designed to, returning you to health.

In addition to lifestyle changes, Functional Medicine treatments may include combinations of drugs, botanical medicines, nutritional supplements, therapeutic diets, or detoxification programs. But you will always have a big role in choosing those treatments because, as a patient of a Functional Medicine provider, you become an active partner in the design of your own treatment plan. This allows you take charge of improving your own health and changing the outcome of disease.



Think of disease as a giant weed sprouting out of the body's soil. "What's above ground is easier to see and, in many ways, easier to treat. But unless you dig down and uproot the weed, you'll never contain it; you'll only stunt its growth."

-Jeffrey Bland, PhD

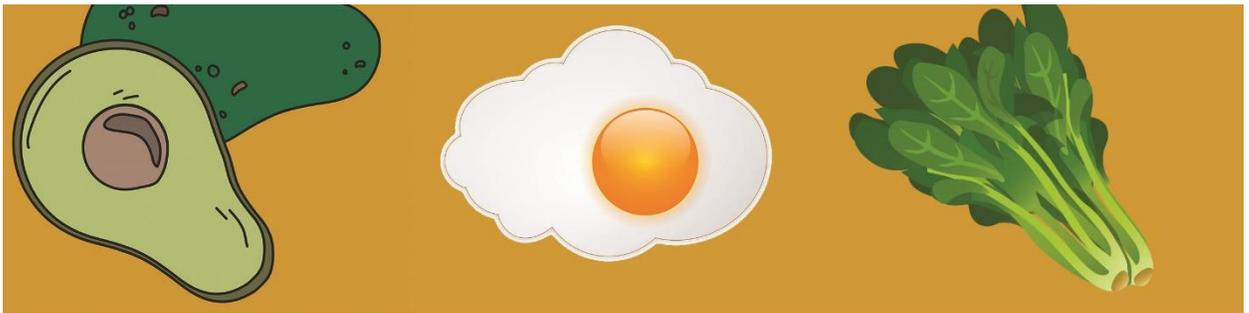
What should I look for in a Functional Medicine provider?

There are many types of providers with just as many approaches. Three things come to mind right away.

- Provider offers extensive lab testing
- Access to high-quality nutraceuticals
- The practitioner weighs in on your health from a variety of vantage points
- Offers integrative care working with health coaches, chiropractors, etc.

A Functional Medicine evaluation should cover the following six pillars of your health.

1. **Diet and Digestion** – Our digestive function is equally as important as our diet. A healthy meal that is not digested properly creates a toxic effect on our body.
2. **Environment and Detoxification** – Our environment is becoming more toxic. It is important to create a timeline that addresses toxic exposure throughout a lifetime.
3. **Mitochondria** – Found in every cell in your body, mitochondria are always busy turning food into oxygen and energy. It is here that metabolism happens. Learning how to boost your mitochondria which are sensitive to damage is essential.



Mitochondria Super-Foods



4. **Brain Health** – Cognitive health is essential for overall health. Inflammation, chronic stress, poor digestive function, and sleep deprivation of all brain-busters.
5. **Stress and Hormones** – Too much stress means too much cortisol which can disrupt our bodies communication center.
6. **Lifestyle** – One of the major issues addressed by a Functional Medicine doctor is lifestyle which includes nutrition, exercise, alcohol use and more.

Did you know...

The tiny units of life in our bodies called cells are consistently dying and replacing themselves. This is why with smart choices and diagnostics we can actually heal ourselves.

Clusters of cells create the composition of organs and glands (you know – heart, liver, brain, etc.) – which make up our body’s systems, (think endocrine, cardiovascular, etc.).

When we approach our health from the cellular level, we discover the amazing potential to move past chronic disease, genetic factors, and past behaviors.

What conditions do Functional Medicine Doctors treat?

Incorporating the latest advances in science, functional medicine affords a completely new way to view chronic wellness issues from dyslipidemia to diabetes, allergies to autoimmune disease, anxiety to autism and more.

The underlying principle is that chronic disorders **such** as these listed below are the result of physiological imbalances throughout your body – from systemic inflammation, insulin resistance, oxidative stress, to hormonal imbalances – made worse by poor diet, lack of key nutrients, stress, emotional and environmental toxins, as well as a sedentary lifestyle.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome	Crohn’s Disease	Chronic Fatigue	High Blood Pressure	Celiac	High Cholesterol
Pre - Diabetes	Diabetes	Metabolic Syndrome	Obesity	Anxiety/ Stress	Thyroid Conditions

What types of lab tests might I expect?

Many people don't venture out to comprehensive testing as most insurance companies have a short list of "approved" tests. Functional Medicine likes to delve deeper and therefore will often suggest more extensive testing.

Here are a few examples:

Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone: The pituitary gland secretes thyroid-stimulating hormones (TSH for short) to help the body regulate — you guessed it — the thyroid. Many people suffer from either an overactive or underactive thyroid. This blood test will give your provider a sense of your overall hormonal health.

IgG ELISA Food Antibodies: This blood test assesses IgG antibodies for 87 combined foods, including gluten. The aim is to pinpoint food allergies and sensitivities that may be disrupting digestion and opening the door to autoimmune disorders and other inflammatory diseases.

Organic Acids Test: Organic acids are urinary markers of metabolism. This urine test looks at issues related to mitochondria, B-vitamin deficiency, detoxification, and more.

Digestive Stool Analysis: Used primarily to identify gastrointestinal disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease, this test also reveals the health of the gut's ecology (good and bad bacteria levels). The analysis detects yeast, parasites, and toxins that cause antibiotic-associated diarrhea.

Saliva Hormone Testing: This test measures levels of the hormones, progesterone, testosterone, and estradiol over 28 days. The aim is to look for imbalances that cause fertility problems as well as disruptions in mood, sleep, and appetite.

Urine Toxic-Metals Test: Heavy metals in the environment can enter the body through air, water, and food. This urine test requires the patient to drink a chelating agent (a substance that binds to heavy metals and moves them out of the body through urine). Over a six- to 24-hour period, urine is collected and sent to the lab to be screened for lead, mercury, cadmium, and other heavy metals.

How should I prepare for a visit with a Functional Medicine doctor?

- Start a journal and list your objectives. What is your ideal vision of your health?
- Decide if you are truly ready to prioritize your health even if it is challenging.
- Go ahead and start clearing out the junk food in your pantry.
- Be prepared to be 100% honest at your provider visit.



Letter from Dr. George

Too often, people think of “wellness” in temporary terms. They want to work with doctors and take short-term steps, like medication, to improve annoying symptoms but never deal with unhealthy routines and lifestyle choices that created the illness in the first place.

After years of seeing this happen with patients, I opened a functional medicine clinic that not only helps patients improve their overall wellness and health, but also gives them the tools and coaching to successfully continue their journey for the rest of their lives.

At VIDA Integrative Medicine, you'll be cared for by an experienced team consisting of a functional medicine practitioner, physician assistant, health coach, patient coordinator, and medical assistants with access to chiropractors, nutritionists and acupuncturists to ensure the fastest return back to health.

As such, our integrative medicine approach under the guidance is based on the following:

- Complementary to and inclusive of a variety of treatment modalities
- Holistically oriented, focusing on mind, body, and spirit
- Focusing on optimal health – not just the absence of symptoms or disease
- Requires patient to take an active role in health creation
- Acknowledges the multi-factorial nature of complex situations, requiring a multi-dimensional approach
- A preference for natural, non-toxic therapies – harnessing the body's ability to heal itself

We treat the “whole body” as an integrated system and search for underlying causes in the interaction between an individual's genetic uniqueness, lifestyle, environment and diet.

My goal is to design each patient a personally tailored health-management program that couples pharmaceutical science, where necessary, with changes in the patient's environment, diet, and lifestyle.

So, what do you think?

Are you ready to take your health to the next level?

Are you ready to embark on a journey to vibrant health?

Schedule a free consultation at carolyngeorgemd.com