



Why You Should See a Functional Medicine Practitioner This Year

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Received: February 20, 2019; **Published:** May 15, 2019

We live in a culture where the predominant medical system is reactive to our bodies' breakdowns.

When people turn to functional medicine practitioners and naturopathic doctors, often there's something wrong that needs to be fixed now. People are often frustrated with the lack of explanation and results they've gotten with traditional medicine.

Preventive medicine is rarely the focus of new patient visits. Few people come into my practice feeling great or wanting to learn how they can continue to feel great ten years from now.

However, at the start of the new year, better health and lifestyle choices, more people are interested in taking an inventory of their health and may visit a functional medicine practitioner for support to maintain or increase wellness.

Some may start exercising more and want a food and dietary supplement plan that supports new goals

A practitioner can help discover what's currently working well in your body, what's working less well, and which routines and supplements will optimize function for every organ in our body.

Focus on your body's needs

Ideally, a functional medicine doctor will inspire you to learn and appreciate how your body functions.

This may include looking at various bio-markers, genetic predispositions, family medical history, food allergies, and which foods, vitamins, probiotics, herbs, essential fatty acids, and other natural therapies that may help close the gap between genetic predispositions and how your body functions. A good functional medicine practitioner will educate you on how your body works in layman's terms.

Health and wellbeing assessment

The goal of functional medicine is to optimize function.

Some people might see a functional medicine doctor to get an understanding of their body because allopathic doctors are not trained in the paradigm of talking about optimal function.

Allopathic doctors practice in a medical model of treating symptoms or named diseases.

Nutritional levels in an allopathic model are considered relative to disease and dysfunction. Allopathic doctors assess vitamin levels as either sufficient or deficient relative to RDA studies done in the 1950s with mice. In contrast, functional medicine practitioners assess vitamin levels in terms of optimal function.

For example, in an allopathic model, technically a patient with Vitamin C deficiency symptoms is diagnosed with Scurvy.

In a functional medicine model, a specially trained practitioner might look at symptoms of bruising easily, bleeding gums, chronic infections, or allergies as an "insufficient amount of Vitamin C for optimal function" that has NOTHING TO DO WITH SCURVY or a diagnosis of a vitamin deficiency. A functional medicine perspective looks at nutrition with a much wider lens of interactive symptoms that have nothing to do with name diseases that are from "Vitamin deficiencies". Technically, it's not a deficiency with a single diagnosis. Instead, from a systemic approach, symptoms may be correlated to insufficient amounts of nutrients that have profound systemic effects that interfere with optimal function.

In a preventive care model, before making an initial assessment, a functional medicine doctor might speak with a person and do lab tests or other evaluations to gather information about:

- Lifestyle
- Diet
- Past health
- Family history
- Organ function
- Hormones
- Nutrient levels, including vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, and amino acids

Some functional medicine practitioners spend several hours with a client to do a comprehensive evaluation to look at many variables of health and lifestyle.

Once she or he has this holistic information in hand, they can then identify organs, nutrients, and systems that are functioning well and those that are not functioning as ideally as they could be. The doctor might then invite a person to work with them on a three-, six-, or nine-month plan aimed at teaching you how to keep your systems functioning optimally and how to get and keep your body on track.

Improving function

A functional medicine practitioner's care plan will focus on problem areas and close the gap between

1. Stress and distress
2. Normal and optimal function
3. Interpreting what the body is saying that is a message to learn from
4. Myths and reality about how to create optimal health for you as an individual with your strengths and weaknesses
5. Health promotion vs disease or symptom management

Because these doctors have training to order tests that traditional M.D.s don't, they're better positioned to provide care plans that are tailored to a person's individual needs, even or especially if those needs change over time.

Unlike traditional Western medicine, a one-size fits all approach isn't the basis of care.

When I come up with a plan, for example, it's not because I've seen 150 other people in the last two months that are pretty similar to patient 151. The vitamins, minerals, probiotics, and herbal formulas I might use with one patient in three or six months might be very different than what I prescribe for them now, and they might be very different from what I recommend for another patient with the exact same symptoms or named diseases. There is a therapeutic phase and there's a maintenance phase to educate clients. During this time, ongoing assessments require adjusting potency, dosages, and sometimes even ingredients.

It doesn't mean that the health providers tells them exactly what they need to do, and then says, "call me in two months." It all depends on the individual. Functional medicine doctors work closely with patients over time to optimize function, paying close attention to the body's response and progress along the way.

Many begin to speak with a functional medicine doctor to evaluate function that's faltering after some remedies have not worked in the past.

Here's an example: a practitioner might discover you have insufficient amounts of nutrients based on lab tests, and though it may be clear why your allergies are better when you take certain herbs, your allergies are still not going away. In another case, we understand why symptoms of depression and colitis is better, but you might be frustrated that the dietary supplements that worked a year or two years ago aren't working anymore.

This gives the doctor a much bigger lens to look through.

The care plan is then adjusted—beyond using a supplement that's going to close the gap of your depression or colitis. Often a functional doctor needs to work on getting the mercury, aluminum and other toxins out of your body, which may be an underlying factor that's affecting big-picture function. For most patients, it's often the case that no one has really worked with them and showed them the big-picture before. No doctor has tested their nutrient levels and determined what's needed for generating optimal health in their individual body.

A functional medicine practitioner will diagnose and treat specific conditions using natural ingredients, but they do much more than that. Think of them as a collaborative partner that helps you understand how your body works and create a plan for long-term wellness as well as accomplish symptomatic relief. They will help you fix the root causes of health issues, not throw a Band-Aid over them with magic bullet prescriptions – natural or synthetic that only target symptomatic relief.

If you are feeling stuck or frustrated by the care you get now, you might be ready for a more proactive and adaptable plan that helps you take charge of your health. This is what you can expect from a well trained and experienced functional medicine practitioner.

Volume 2 Issue 6 June 2019

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