

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.