

FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE POCKET GUIDE

FAST FACTS

- It is estimated that 90% of type 2 diabetes, 70% of colon cancer, 70% of stroke, and 80% of coronary artery disease are lifestyle-related and might be prevented by making healthy lifestyle decisions.¹
- Functional medicine is a type of integrative medicine that focuses on nutritional and environmental approaches for addressing physical and mental health issues.²
- Functional medicine practitioners seek to treat the nutritional and metabolic causes of disease rather than treating the symptoms of a particular disease.³
- The American Heart Association released a statement for health care professionals stressing the importance of self-care/lifestyle approaches in the management of cardiovascular disease and stroke.⁴
- Currently, 75% of the United States health care spending is used to treat chronic illnesses that might have been prevented by making different lifestyle choices.⁵

WHAT IS FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE?

Functional medicine physicians believe that disease is caused by complex networks of relationships between different metabolic and physiological systems in the body and that these relationships are modifiable with nutrition and behavior. Practitioners take a patient-centered approach to medicine as opposed to only focusing on the individual's disease.

The goal of functional medicine is to unearth and understand these metabolic relationships and attempt to optimize or balance them to help you heal. The conventional approach to medicine is to understand your diagnosis and then prescribe medicines to treat the pathology or symptoms associated with that diagnosis. In functional medicine, the physician will work to find the chemical causes of what is ailing you and look at behaviors or environmental conditions you can change. It is common for functional medicine physicians to include health coaching and nutritional counseling as part of a patient's treatment plan.

WHAT CONDITIONS DO FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE PRACTITIONERS TREAT?

Functional medicine is used to treat both physical and mental health conditions and address symptoms related to chronic health concerns including, but not limited to:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Metabolic syndrome
- Fibromyalgia
- Chronic fatigue
- Autoimmune diseases
- Functional disorders
- Musculoskeletal problems
- Stress related disorders
- Arthritis
- Excess weight and slow metabolism
- Migraines and headaches
- Digestive disease
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Dementia
- Hormonal disorders
- Heavy metal toxicity
- Mold exposure
- Food/environmental allergies

Is there evidence that functional medicine works?

In the last 20 years, as patients increasingly integrate complementary and alternative medicine into their treatment plans, more and more literature is being published exploring and confirming the positive impact of lifestyle on health. Although there have been few formal tests, there are approaches with similarities to using functional medicine for treating and decreasing the symptoms of certain conditions. Some examples are as follows:

- Women with fatigue, stress and digestive disorders who engaged in a functional medicine approach called the Kalish method for 28 weeks experienced a 38% average decrease in fatigue, a 27% average decrease in stress, and a 22 percent average decrease in confusion.⁶
- A meta-analysis of adults with a high risk of developing diabetes found that lifestyle interventions similar to but not identical with functional medicine approaches (such as diet changes and exercise) successfully reduced diabetes incidence and this effect was seen years after the intervention had ended.⁷

- Research studies have found that lifestyle interventions, including diet modifications and exercise, are an effective strategy for pregnant women suffering from gestational diabetes.⁸
- Primary care patients with anxiety and/or depression who received a lifestyle intervention focused on diet modification and increasing physical activity saw their anxiety, depression and stress related symptoms decrease.⁹

If you or your health care provider would like to explore more research on functional medicine's impact on a particular health concern, visit: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=%22lifestyle+intervention%22+or+%22functional+medicine%22++or+%22lifestyle+medicine%22>

Are there precautions, side effects or safety concerns I should be aware of before I pursue functional medicine?

Functional medicine is widely considered a safe way of addressing physical and mental conditions when delivered by a certified functional medicine practitioner.

As is the case with seeking medical services from any physician, you may experience side effects from the specific treatment plan given to you by your physician.

It is common for a functional medicine doctor or a referred dietician to make changes to your diet that may cause digestive issues while your body adjusts to your new diet.

You may also experience discomfort or anxiety with the number of diagnostic tests that you may have to endure, including blood draws.

How often should I seek treatment from a functional medicine practitioner? How long is each session?

How often and for how long you will see your functional medicine doctor is dependent on the reason you are seeking the help of a clinician. In addition to seeing your functional medicine practitioner, you will be scheduled for physiological tests and blood draws. It is also possible you will be referred to a registered dietician or nutritionist and/or an exercise specialist who will monitor and make adjustments to your diet and current level of physical activity.

What training/certifications do functional medicine clinicians need to have to practice?

To obtain certification as a functional medicine practitioner, you must be a licensed medical, naturopathic, osteopathic or chiropractic doctor. Certification is open to doctors of all disciplines. Additionally, other individuals in the health care field can also qualify for certification including dentists, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, registered nurses, registered dietitians, acupuncturists, and pharmacists.

There are extensive educational requirements for an individual to be certified as a functional medicine physician, including taking and passing an Applying Functional Medicine in Clinical Practice (AFMCP) course and classes in six additional modules.

How do I find a functional medicine practitioner near me?

The Institute for Functional Medicine
<https://www.ifm.org/find-a-practitioner/>

How much will seeing a functional medicine practitioner cost me?

The cost of receiving functional medicine will vary based on location, provider and extent of services needed. How much you will pay out of pocket to see a functional medicine practitioner will depend on your insurance coverage. The first visit can cost several hundred dollars in addition to the cost of blood and lab work, which can add up quickly. Follow-up visits are less costly.

Will my insurance company cover the cost of seeing a functional medicine practitioner?

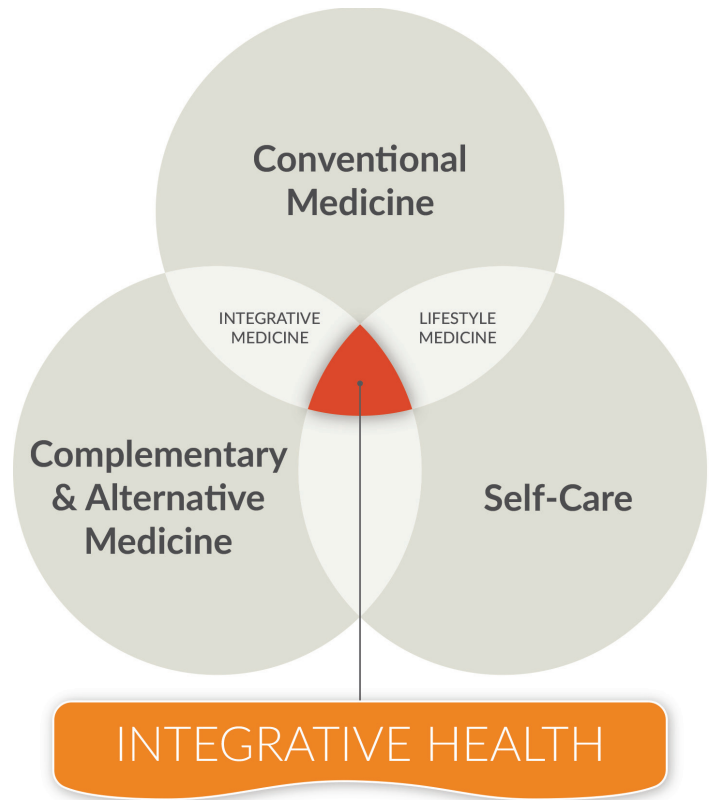
Whether your insurance company covers functional medicine and the extent to which they will cover it depends on your individual coverage. Most insurance companies will cover the cost of seeing a functional medicine practitioner if they are a licensed practitioner covered in the state – but not always.

Some of the blood and other tests may be covered, but many may not be as functional medicine physicians often order tests that go beyond usual medical coverage. The best way to find out whether your insurance company covers functional medicine is to contact your insurance provider and ask about both the provider and the tests they plan to order.

Additionally, it is common for a functional medicine practitioner to refer you to specialists such as a dietician or health coach. These may not be covered. Please also check with your insurance company whether you have coverage for any practitioners you are referred to by a functional medicine clinician.

Should I inform my primary care physician that I am seeing a functional medicine clinician?

Yes. It is important when deciding to begin using functional medicine to let your primary care physician and any other health care providers treating you know that you would like to include functional medicine in the tools you are using to address your medical condition or concern. Adjustments in medications and other treatments may need to be made by your physician once you start. To receive optimal treatment and effectively address your psychological or physical condition, it is best to openly communicate with all of your health care providers. Open communication can help you and your health care providers avoid complications that may arise and integrate treatments or clinicians you employ to address your condition.



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