



What is functional medicine?

Functional medicine for adult health care

by Maggie B. Covington, M.D.

Functional medicine is an approach to healing that addresses imbalances in an individual's biochemistry and physiology that can lead or already may have led to chronic disease. Chronic disease states do not appear overnight; they are often the result of prolonged states of imbalance that go unnoticed or undetected for years before symptoms of the disease actually manifest. Returning patients to health requires reversing, or substantially improving, the specific imbalances that have contributed to the disease state.

Some key principles of functional medicine include:

- Each person possesses his/her own biochemical individuality that results from a unique interplay between genetics, the environment, nutrition, stress, and emotions, as well as other lifestyle factors.
- Care focuses on the patient who has the disease, not the disease the patient has.
- No organ system operates in isolation; there is a web-like connection between all the systems in the body, including the mind and spirit.
- Understanding and treating the underlying cause of dysfunction and disease is much more effective than just treating the symptoms of the disease.
- True health is experienced as a sense of vitality and energy, not just the absence of disease. Every effort is made to support the body by giving it what it needs to function optimally and/or taking away what may be harming it or draining its energy reserves.
- The focus is on restoring health and function, not just controlling symptoms.

There are several core imbalances that the functional medicine practitioner may evaluate during his/her assessment of the patient. These include imbalances in hormones and neurotransmitters; energy production; detoxification; digestion, absorption and elimination capacities; the immune system; the level of inflammation in the body; and structural imbalances all the way from the cell membranes to the muscles and bones.

The evaluation also includes a very detailed history, physical examination, and when necessary, specific testing of blood, urine, stool, and /or saliva in order to gain detailed information about the individual's core imbalances. Treatment plans are tailored to each patient based on all the information gathered from the

comprehensive evaluation. Diet and nutrition, vitamin, mineral, and herbal supplements, stress management, exercise, along with appropriate conventional medications, are important therapeutic tools used by the functional medicine practitioner.

Many chronic disorders can be effectively treated with a functional medicine approach, including, but not limited to:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Adrenal fatigue
- Anxiety
- Arthritis (Osteoarthritis and Rheumatoid Arthritis)
- Asthma
- Autism
- Asperger's Syndrome
- Candidiasis (Yeast overgrowth)
- Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Cardiovascular disease
- Depression
- Diabetes mellitus
- Eczema
- Fatigue
- Fibromyalgia
- Food allergies/sensitivities
- Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
- Headaches
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn's, Ulcerative Colitis)
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Insomnia
- Menopause
- Metabolic Syndrome
- Obesity
- Osteoporosis
- Perimenopause
- Sinusitis

- Vitamin and mineral deficiencies

Functional medicine is a holistic, personalized, and scientific approach to care that incorporates knowledge across medical disciplines. It is a very effective approach to treating chronic problems, particularly when conventional approaches have failed.

Maggie B Covington, MD

Dr Covington is a family physician who practices functional medicine. This is an approach that assesses a patient's underlying nutritional and biochemical imbalances that contribute to illness, and individually tailors therapies to restore health and improve function.

Dr. Covington received her medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine and completed her training in family medicine at the University Of Maryland Medical Center. She has completed additional training in nutrition, functional medicine through the Institute for Functional Medicine, and medical acupuncture through the Helms Medical Institute and UCLA. She has held academic faculty positions at Howard University College of Medicine, University of Southern California School of Medicine, and the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

Beyond providing general preventive health care, Dr. Covington's areas of interests include, but are not limited to, the assessment and treatment of hormonal, nutritional, and neurochemical imbalances manifesting as chronic fatigue, anxiety, digestive disorders, metabolic syndrome, depression, menopause, and osteoporosis.