

Getting Started with Functional Medicine



Getting Started

At Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine, healing is based on a partnership and a process. It's common to feel a bit overwhelmed by the end of your visit. This is why we want to provide guidance for how to get started on your healing journey.

To begin, carefully read the materials and follow the guidelines we provide in order to learn more about the healing process or treatment we are recommending. We are partners with you in your journey to optimal wellness.

Next, it is important to understand that healing depends not only on doing the right things, but doing them in the right order. Doing the right thing in the wrong order may result in failure or worsening of the illness. Finding the right medication, surgical procedure, herb or alternative modality to treat a 'disease' may fail, even though it is the right thing to do, if it is done in the wrong order.

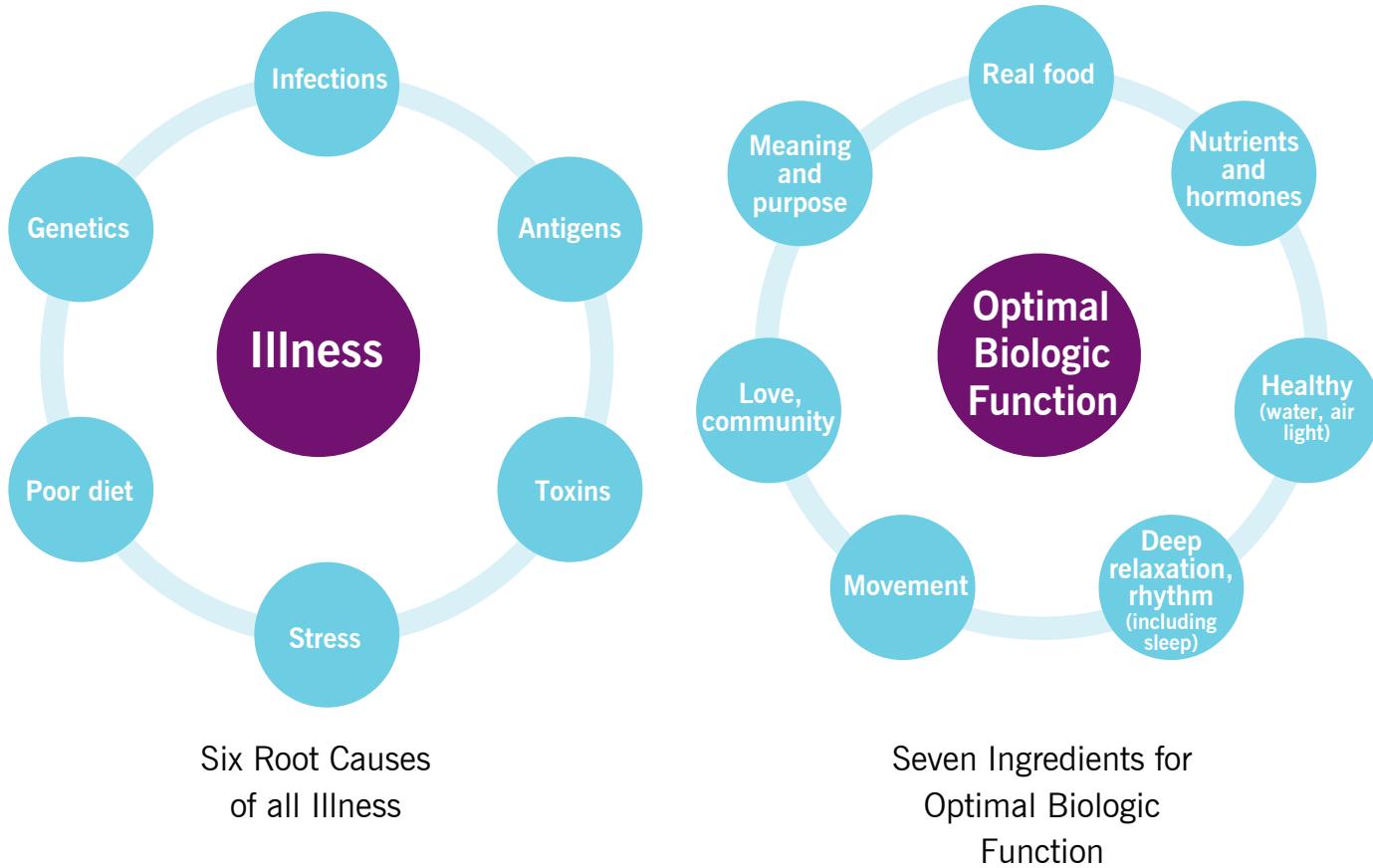
The Right Order of Things: Peeling The Onion of Chronic Disease

As we begin your journey to optimal wellness, there are often many things to do and it is difficult to choose which to do first. Illness is never simply one discrete process or dysfunction, but rather a bundle of factors - genetics, early influences, environment, diet, lifestyle, habits, travel, relationships, beliefs - woven into your story and biology. Understanding the original causes, or root causes, for your illness is an essential task to determine where we start first, which layer to peel away, or which knot to untangle in the web of physiologic dysfunction.

Over the past 20 years, we have established principles and well-traveled routes to healing that are straightforward. These enable us to make sense of chronic disease and involve examining the entire system. This is what we call Functional Medicine.

Our first task as partners is to persistently seek the cause(s) of the illness. Thankfully, there are only six root causes for illness: Infections, antigens, toxins, stress, poor diet and genetics. Our second task is to identify the seven "ingredients" needed for optimal biological function.

The Right Order of Things



The presence of any of the six root causes of disease and the absence of any of the seven essential ingredients creates imbalance in the body's physiological process and lays the foundation for chronic disease. Together, we will become experts in assessing the deficiency of these "ingredients" and provide the necessary conditions for thriving. Throughout your journey, you will think less of 'naming' your disease, and more about understanding what is driving it.

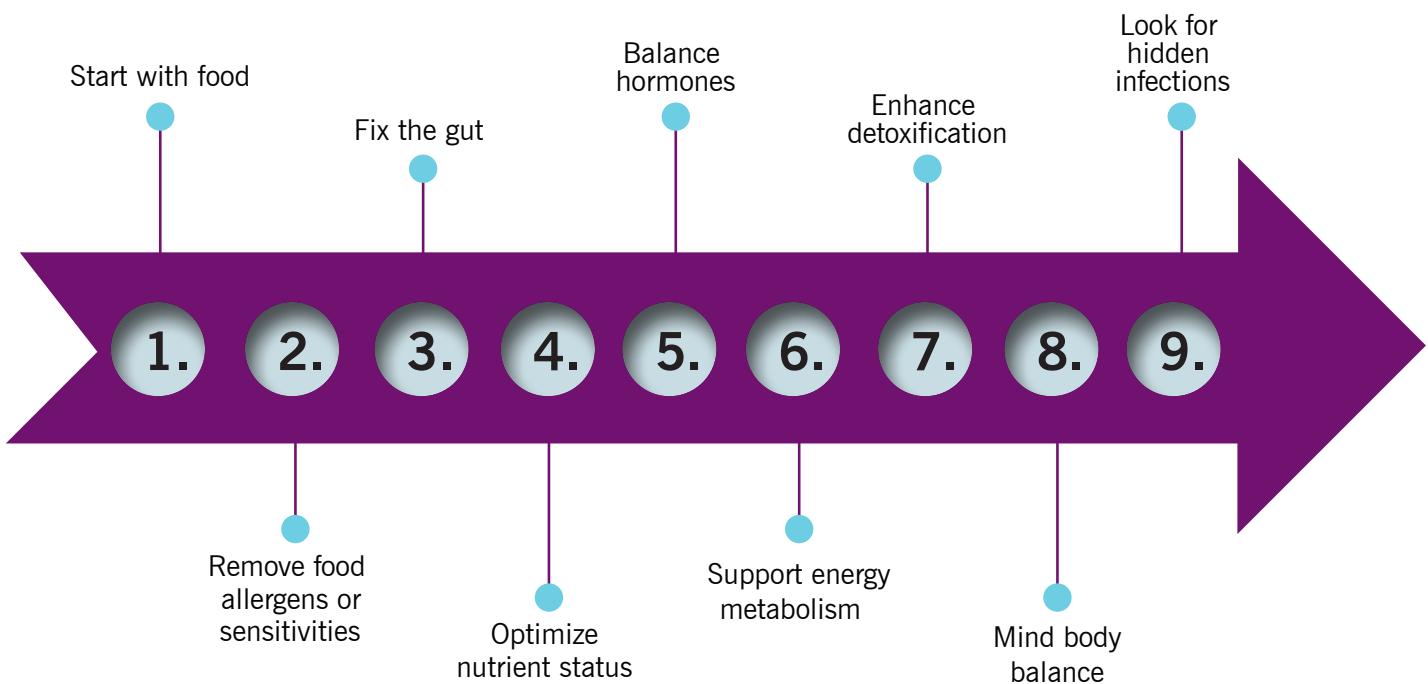
Fortunately, the body knows how to heal if we remove the impediments and provide the proper conditions in the right order. This takes time, patience and persistence. The trick lies in having a place to start and understanding how to peel back the layers of dysfunction and in what order.

The Right Order of Things: Peeling The Onion of Chronic Disease (cont'd)

What is the Right Order?

These steps are listed in order of priority for peeling the onion of chronic illness. This is how we practice Functional Medicine and what we have found leads to the most success in healing. Sometimes we will do multiple things at once, for example, start hormone therapy along with immediate dietary changes and treatments to heal the gut. Healing is a process. And not always linear. It is more like tailoring – making adjustments each step along the way until we get it just right.

What is the Right Order: Peeling the Onion of Chronic Disease



1.

Start with Food

Food is by far the most powerful clinical intervention in chronic disease. You will learn to apply it, and use it skillfully, with the guidance of your dietitian /nutritionist utilizing a whole foods diet. In Functional Medicine we believe that food is not only medicine but also information that can turn on or off various gene expressions and provide energy for your body. You will work with your dietitian/nutritionist to determine an appropriate food plan. You will follow this plan until your first follow-up appointment, at which point additional food-related recommendations will be given. Nutrition is not one size fits all. This is a perfect opportunity to work with a nutrition professional to determine your body's nutrient and food needs.

2.

Remove Food Allergens or Sensitivities

Delayed food sensitivities are among the most potent triggers for chronic symptoms and an inflamed immune system. A trial of a comprehensive elimination diet for 4-6 weeks with systematic food reintroduction is a powerful therapeutic and diagnostic tool. The closer you follow this, the faster you will know how much food is playing a role in your illness. Sometimes we just recommend elimination of the most common triggers of symptoms – gluten and dairy, or we may recommend a more comprehensive program.

After introducing a food plan that is based on whole foods, low glycemic load (low sugar/flour), phytonutrient dense diet, food elimination/reintroduction is the least expensive and most powerful diagnostic and therapeutic tool available.

3.

Fix the Gut

Health starts in the gut. The digestive tract has an independent nervous system, and contains 70% of our immune system. We will assess your gut through history and appropriate diagnostic tests (for gluten sensitivities, inflammation in the gut, unwanted bugs like parasites or yeast). We will then aggressively treat the causes of gut dysfunction, including leaky gut, delayed food sensitivities, small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), yeast overgrowth and parasites.

We may use herbs, antibiotic, anti-fungal, and anti-parasitic medications as well as botanicals to eradicate the triggers of intestinal dysfunction. Repair and healing of the gut may require the use of digestive enzymes, pre-biotics (food for healthy bacteria), probiotics (healthy bacteria), and additional nutrients.

The Right Order of Things: Peeling The Onion of Chronic Disease (cont'd)

4.

Optimize Nutrient Status

Nutrient deficiencies affect up to 92% of Americans. Vitamins and minerals are necessary for every biochemical reaction in your body. Without adequate amounts of nutrients for optimal health your biochemistry gets stuck and you get sick.

The most common are magnesium (think anything that is tight, irritable or crampy – muscles, bowels, lungs, moods), zinc (for immune function), vitamin D (for anyone who lives in the upper northern and lower southern hemispheres not on supplementation), methylation (B6, folic acid, B12) necessary for detoxification, cognitive function and DNA repair among hundreds of other essential biologic functions, and omega 3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) the stuff of which we are (or are supposed to be) made. Depending on testing, other deficiencies may be found and treated.

5.

Balance Hormones

Hormonal and neurotransmitter dysfunction is rampant because of dietary influences on hormones (sugar and refined flour), endocrine disruptors or xenobiotics (petrochemicals and heavy metals) and chronic stress.

The delicate balance of hormones is essential for health and understanding the factors that cause disruption and restore balance of hormones is essential. Of the dozens of hormones, four categories are the most important for treatment of chronic disease: Insulin resistance, the stress response and adrenal insufficiency, thyroid dysfunction, and sex hormone dysfunction. Diet, exercise, optimizing sleep, stress management, bio-identical hormone replacement, nutrient support, herbal therapies, complementary therapies like acupuncture and Traditional Chinese medicine are among the most effective tools we use.

6.

Support Energy Metabolism

The end result of many nutritional, toxic, antigenic, infectious and stress insults is injury to the mitochondria, (our body's energy factories), unchecked oxidative stress and the loss of energy and ultimately cell death.

This has led to epidemics of obesity, diabetes, fatigue, developmental and neurodegenerative disorders, and accelerated aging. We assess mitochondrial dysfunction using organic acid and amino acid analysis, and support and protect mitochondrial function. This is often an important step in supporting health and recovery from chronic illness.

7.

Enhance Detoxification

Detoxification is one of the most important and metabolically demanding functions of our physiology, and one that health professionals learn little about. Just ask anyone with renal or liver failure or chronic constipation. The toxic burden of 2.9 billion pounds of petrochemical toxins and 6 million pounds of mercury unloaded into our environment every year has put an undue stress on our capacity for detoxification.

Identifying heavy metal toxicity, particularly mercury and lead through provocation challenge testing, is an important part of diagnosing and treating chronic disease. Based on test results, treatment could start immediately, but may occur after your digestion, immune function, hormones and nutrition has been normalized.

We support your body's own detoxification enzymes through phytonutrients, amino acids, vitamins and minerals. However, mobilizing toxins must be done after all other aspects of your biologic systems have been optimized and pathways for detoxification are working full speed.

The Right Order of Things: Peeling The Onion of Chronic Disease (cont'd)

8.

Mind Body Balance

Finding meaning and connection in the context of your illness and within the tapestry of your life, relationships and beliefs is indeed, an essential pillar of the healing process. We support you to develop skills in self-care and nourishment and stress management, such as exercise, yoga, meditation, or other ways to balance your mind and body. These are actually both the first and the last step in healing. Learning to deeply relax, let go of worry, and build trust in life and the healing process, is a necessary ingredient for becoming well.

9.

Look for Hidden Infections

If we find you don't respond fully to treatment of the basic systems outlined so far, or if you have lab results that indicate inflammation, testing for hidden infections often identifies unsuspected triggers: Viruses, atypical bacteria, tick-borne illness, and dental infections (root canals). If there are no bugs inside, we consider the possibility of exposure to mold in the home or workplace.



There Are Many Programs Available in the Center for Functional Medicine

If you are ready to take the next step towards improving your health and wellness check out one of the programs below to get started.

There are many programs available in the Center for Functional Medicine and because of the demand on the department we are continually creating new programming in an effort to manage the one-on-one appointment waiting list. Check **Functional Medicine Programs** for the most up to date information.

Functioning for Life™ – a robust 10-week program of shared medical appointments are designed as disease-specific programs where you select the series that is right for you and provides the necessary laboratory testing, health information and dietary guidance needed to achieve optimal wellness.

Behavioral Health – Learn how to build a better sense of self resulting in improved self-esteem, wellness and stronger familial and social relationships with a one-on-one appointment.

Get Functional Detox Program – Participate in a 4-week SMA covering a 10 Day Detox kicked off with Mark Hyman, MD.

Cognitive Health – A 10-week SMA providing guidance needed to support cognitive health.

Prostate Cancer Clinic – A one-on-one appointment focusing on the simple act of eating the right foods to improve your chances of becoming a prostate cancer survivor.

Online On-Demand Nutrition Consultations: Individual appointments with our Functional Medicine registered dietitians to guide you in establishing eating habits and lifestyle changes necessary for achieving long-term health goals. To schedule your appointment, login to **Cleveland Clinic Express Care® Online** and select Nutrition Services.

