



*THOSE WRINKLES, THAT
BLOAT, THE ANXIETY—IT'S
YOUR BODY TRYING TO
TELL YOU SOMETHING'S
WRONG. FUNCTIONAL
MEDICINE PRACTITIONERS
ARE LISTENING.*

by Heidi Mitchell

The two quotation marks that sit between your eyebrows aren't there because you're angry. True, you may be a little tense these days, but they twitch, furrow, and linger because your body is under chronic oxidative stress, or your gut is inflamed, or you have a nasty hidden infection.

Go to a dermatologist, and she'll inject you with Botox to erase their appearance—but the underlying problem persists. Go to a practitioner of functional medicine (FM), and she will run a battery of lab tests, ask about your lifestyle, and prescribe a systems-based, top-down approach that might include diet changes, acupuncture, herbal supplements, biofeedback, and massage—and reveal positive results in six months, or even a week.

Functional medicine dates back to 1991, when Dr. Jeffrey Bland decided that fighting chronic diseases with drugs might not be the best way to bring health to millions. He and his wife Susan set up the **Institute for Functional Medicine** (ifm.org), which certifies medical doctors, herbalists, acupuncturists, and other medical practitioners in a holistic approach to wellness that marries all the science of Western medicine with 5,000 years of Eastern knowledge. Rather than treating a disease or out-of-whack body function, practitioners of FM consider genetics, lifestyle, and all signs and systems to help bring a patient to homeostasis: their own personal wellness best.

Experts believe that FM has been booming in the past five years or so because there is growing mistrust between patients and medical practitioners. "The opioid epidemic caused a lot of distrust," says Duncan Macdonald, senior faculty at the **Kalish Institute** (kalishinstitute.com) in San Francisco, one of the leading organizations within the discipline. "And there has been a basic epiphany that there is always a root cause to a disease, and the symptoms are just expressions of that. If you don't address the root cause, you'll just be a polypharmacy case—your own little lab." He notes that in 2016 the Mayo Clinic published its first pilot study on FM, with dramatically positive results, and the revered temple of innovative medicine, the Cleveland Clinic, announced plans in 2016 to double the physical size and patient capacity at its Center for Functional Medicine after being open less than two years. The center had quickly reached maximum capacity and prior to the expansion kept a waiting list of more than 1,000 clients.

PILL

Unlike conventional Western medicine, FM remains unregulated, but the best practitioners are typically certified by top institutions like Kalish, the IFM, and the **Kresser Institute** (kresserinstitute.com). The majority are not specialized, though the most sought-after professionals have a passion for a particular focus within their practice. Which means if your fine lines are driving you bananas, your body is letting you down, or you're overwhelmed with depression, holistic help is never far away. In fact you may be just one visit away from optimal health.

GOING AU NATUREL

If you break your arm, you go to the emergency room, where doctors excel in triage. "But if you have ongoing issues, you want to see a functional medicine practitioner," says cosmetic acupuncturist Shellie Goldstein of **Shellie Goldstein Associates** (hamptonsacupuncture.com). She works out of offices in New York City and the Hamptons, and sees everyone from celebrities to millennials who would rather find a natural remedy for their wrinkles or rosacea than a surgical one. After an initial consultation with each patient, Goldstein will find an ideal treatment protocol for each client. Her most popular modalities are acupuncture, microcurrent, LED lights, and ultrasound—all used on the face, all able to improve skin tone and suppleness without any knives. "People are no longer interested in that tight, frozen appearance. They want to look natural and healthy," says Goldstein.

"Your external appearance is a reflection of your internal health, so in addition to the face I treat the underlying conditions, such as stress, digestive problems, and sleep disorders. Then we treat the muscles by either relaxing those that are too tight or toning those that are overstretched or weak. Your face will look different after one session." After 10, you'll look brand-new. Then it's just maintenance. Goldstein sells services by time, not modality, so there's no "upselling" on the table; she calls her therapies "a workout for the face."

A typical patient may present with wrinkles and during the intake Goldstein may determine she actually has insomnia or is going through perimenopause. An AcuFacial integrates health and beauty so everything is addressed during a session. "It's an inside-out approach," she explains. Her facial cupping, for example, improves lymph drainage, tightens and plumps the skin, and can also alleviate congestion due to spring allergies. Seventy percent of users of her facial acupressure tool, Touch+Glow, said that they saw an improvement in their self-image. "When you feel good, you look good," says Goldstein. "And looking good helps you to feel better about yourself." She's been doing FM for beauty for a decade but is seeing a huge increase in interest lately. "In a recent poll, 60 percent of acupuncture patients asked about cosmetic acupuncture. It is one of the fastest-growing acupuncture specialties," she says. "I teach student and postgraduate cosmetic acupuncture at Tri-State College of Acupuncture, and my classes are packed."

Goldstein is not alone. An increasing

number of cosmetologists have embraced FM to help clients achieve inner and outer beauty. At **Take Care Spa** (takecarenyc.com) in New York's East Village, supermodels come in for microcurrent and LED facials with aestheticians personally chosen by Sadie Adams. **The Yang Institute of Integrative Medicine** (taoinstitute.com) in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania uses moxibustion (cupping) and acupuncture to reduce the signs of aging in six weeks. A 1996 report in the *International Journal of Clinical Acupuncture* showed that among 300 people treated with cosmetic acupuncture, 90 percent had marked effects with only one course of treatment. "People have been using acupuncture as a preventive treatment to aging for millennia," Goldstein says. "It works."

ALL ABOUT THE WHY

Because FM treats the whole body and all its systems, any chronic symptoms a patient may present will likely be discovered through blood work, stool samples, and urine tests. "We have a saying in functional medicine that we test, not guess," says Macdonald, who has his own practice in San Francisco, **Origins Medicine** (originsmedicine.com). "You could almost say that FM is an extension of Eastern medicine in that they are both holistic systems-based approaches to health." He explains that if you get your blood measured by your internist, he might say you are low on B vitamins. "But what your doctor isn't telling you is why. Are you low because you're not taking >

STOPPERS



enough, or because stress is driving your B vitamin consumption into overdrive? Or are you low because your gut is not absorbing B vitamins?"

Practitioners typically test three main body systems. The first regulates stress hormones (cortisol, DHEA), which create inflammation that can cause anything from joint pain, depression, and skin issues to lethargy, food cravings, and mood issues. The second is the gut, where a lot of hidden infections can lead to autoimmune disease and inflammation. *H-pylori* is a big one, known for causing ulcers and stomach cancer, but it can also be the culprit in rheumatoid arthritis or Hashimoto's disease. The third system is the liver's detox pathway. "If you want to get depressed, look at the CDC's Fourth National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals. We live in an extremely toxic environment," says Macdonald. "Our detox pathways are nutrient-dependent. Maybe 30 years ago we could have gotten everything we needed from food, but we now have to assist those pathways. If the liver is overwhelmed, it is a big driver of inflammation and it disrupts the whole hormonal system. As we say: Everything causes everything."

Macdonald has examples of a patient presenting with a stubborn rash, anxiety, and stomach pains. After running lab tests, he found an infection, which he cleared in about 60 days with natural remedies. Another patient presented with the same symptoms, but he turned out to have a heavy-metal issue. "That is why we test and don't guess," he says. And testing is a big motivator: When patients see what their lifestyle is doing to them in black and white lab results,

they are typically willing to make changes such as getting eight hours of sleep a night, hitting the gym three times a week, and meditating, plus taking herbal supplements and doing acupuncture. He sees patients once in person for a long session then often continues care via teleconferencing, so he can stay on top of busy executives around the world. He charges about \$1,000–\$2,000 for lab fees, then \$300–\$600 per hour for consultations. Supplements cost \$200–\$600 a month. "It's not cheap, but if you can spot problems before they happen—which conventional Western medicine does not—then functional medicine could be the best savings plan of your life," he says.

Daniela Turley works at **Rahav Wellness** (rahavwellness.com) in New York City, where she is a medical herbalist specializing in stress-related illnesses and autoimmune disease, and skin and digestive complaints. "Normally people come to see us when they have been to see everyone first," says Turley, "and normally they are very sick." She is treating one patient with Lyme disease, as well as a boy who was pulling out his hair for two years and came to see her as a last-ditch attempt at a cure. He stopped within two weeks of biofeedback. Another patient has chronic asthma, so Turley's role is to keep it in check. She enjoys working with teenagers—who present with everything from ADHD to acne to headaches—because they respond quickly.

At the **Cleveland Clinic** (clevelandclinic.org), guru Mark Hyman runs the Center for Functional Medicine, where the 10-week Functioning for Life program helps patients with heart conditions, diabetes, autoimmune illnesses, arthritis, and weight issues and culminates with a mindfulness maintenance plan. The center runs trial studies on diabetes and asthma and is at the forefront of innovation. Hyman, a big advocate of how food impacts health, will almost always recommend a diet overhaul to bring balance to the body. "Food influences your capacity to live a rich, energetic, connected, soulful life," he says. "Food is the doorway to living well."

In Connecticut, Dr. Joel Evans is a gynecologist who founded **The Center for Functional Medicine**

(centerforfunctionalmedicine.com). He has had success using FM to help women get pregnant, battle breast cancer, counter endometriosis, and stay healthy during and after pregnancy. He says he is more excited about FM than ever and takes great pride in helping "patients feel better and eliminate chronic disease on a daily basis."

Macdonald agrees. Through food, medical-grade supplementation, therapies like acupuncture, and lifestyle change, "most illnesses will resolve themselves," he says. "Insomnia, lack of sex drive, rosacea, joint pain ... most of what we think of as diseases of aging are diseases of chronic stress. It's not that we're getting older; it's that we're getting more rundown. If you teach someone how to manage stress and strategically support the function of body systems, you can reclaim health and vigor."

Through food, medical-grade supplementation, therapies like acupuncture, and lifestyle change, most illnesses will resolve themselves. Insomnia, lack of sex drive, rosacea, joint pain... "most of what we think of as diseases of aging are diseases of chronic stress."

MIND OVER MATTER

Antidepressants are some of the most frequently prescribed drugs in America, but FM experts like Chris Kresser believe that depression and anxiety are inflammatory conditions of the brain or the result of hormone imbalances. For patients presenting with mental issues, many FM practitioners would run urinary tests to measure the breakdown of neurotransmitters after they've been processed through the liver. This might reveal that the precursors to the neurotransmitters aren't present in large enough numbers, leading doctors to question why there isn't enough serotonin in the intercellular space to begin with.

Usually the answer is stress, which deprives the body of what it needs to build those precursors. FM practitioners will work with patients to get out of fight-or-flight survival mode and create a plan that props the brain back up to high function. This might include intravenous B vitamins, lifestyle changes, probiotics to heal the gut, and acupuncture. Practitioners have seen major results in as little as a week. Kresser also cites studies that link other behavioral health disorders to chronic immune system hyperactivity. Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety, OCD, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorder are all part of a growing list of cognitive behavioral disorders that peer-reviewed research shows may be caused by chronic inflammation. FM practitioners can treat the root cause, and trim those so-called branches.

Dr. Audrey Greenfield, who studied neuroimmunology, switched from monitoring lab rats to practicing FM when Nobel Laureate Kevin Tracey identified the connection between the brain and the immune system while she was working with him at The Feinstein Institute for Medical Research. "When you're in love or scared, you can feel the physiological manifestation, you can feel your sympathetic nervous system speeding up. This is not something new," says Greenfield, who now practices acupuncture with a specialty in meridian balancing at Shellie Goldstein Associates' New York office. She uses a machine that measures electrical resistance at key spots on the body. Measurements can reveal imbalances, which often relate to symptoms, and can be used to help guide treatment and track progress over time. Her two largest groups of clients are Type A stress cases and the chronically ill—the latter for whom she helps alleviate symptoms (of chemotherapy, for example). She stimulates the meridians not with needles but with an AcuLaser, which works just as well and doesn't turn off needle-phobes. "I have the most success with basic stress-related illnesses," says Dr. Greenfield. "We can alleviate them without medication, through pressure points and modifications in lifestyle." FM is filling in the gaps that Western medicine abandoned, catching illnesses before they become debilitating or stopping them in their tracks by addressing the whole body—almost always without contraindicating drugs. •

GUIDE TO WELLNESS *A NEW BOOK REVEALS THE DIRECT ROUTE TO LIVING HAPPIER AND HEALTHIER.*

Dr. Frank Lipman is on a mission. The in-demand internist and best-selling author's latest book, *How to Be Well: The 6 Keys to a Happy and Healthy Life* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, April 2018), encourages the practice of small, daily steps that will impact long-term wellness. It's a mode of functional medicine that marries cutting-edge nutritional science with ancient healing techniques. After landing on American shores in 1984, Lipman became chief medical resident in his final year of internal medicine residency at Lincoln Hospital in New York, and quickly recognized the limitations of Western medicine. Nearly a decade later, the pioneer of functional medicine set up Manhattan's Eleven Eleven Wellness Center and has been inundated ever since with more A-list health fanatics than we could name here. Forget the cost associated with a series of appointments—getting in can be nearly impossible.

With *How to Be Well*, the South African native hopes to bring his wellness ideology to everyone, no matter the budget or time constraints. In 256 illustrated pages, he lays out simple ways to change less-than-ideal lifestyle habits to effectively "switch off" certain genes that can lead to illness and "switch on" genes that create health (a field of medicine called epigenetics). Through minor events, like walking barefoot outdoors, getting a pet, or volunteering, he says, we can effectively "catch" a disease before it strikes. "A small choice can become a habit, and that habit can lead to healthier habits and, ultimately, to a healthier lifestyle," he says. And yes, Dr. Lipman does have scientific studies to back his claims, including one that shows how memorizing mantras can increase the region of the brain associated with cognitive function.

To simplify his ideology, the New York-based internist distills the essence of functional medicine down to a single anecdote. It basically goes like this: Two patients present with regular, painful headaches. The medical doctor spends more than an hour with each, getting to know their histories and running standard blood work. One patient, it turns out, didn't generate enough stomach acid and was thus incorrectly processing food; the other patient was going through menopause. For the former, he altered her diet and prescribed herbal remedies; for the latter, he balanced her cycle with bioidentical hormones. For both, he recommended massage, acupuncture, and meditation. They found relief within two weeks. "Headaches, like most problems, are multifactorial in nature," says Dr. Lipman. "There are different causes and different treatments for different people—because we are all different emotionally, metabolically, biochemically, and in the way we live our daily lives."

Growing up in South Africa gave Dr. Lipman a fundamental belief in the merits of functional medicine and individualized care. Without the whiz-bang technological innovations of North America or a health care system that rewarded doctors for running costly tests, practitioners had to rely on age-old wisdom, like actually talking to patients. "You can usually make a pretty good diagnosis from taking a good history from the patient," he says. (The blood tests rule out more serious diseases.) Dr. Lipman believes because there is so much information out there related to health—special diets, guides to mindfulness, endless (but questionable) websites—people can become overwhelmed and discouraged from incorporating the right strategies into their own lifestyles. "The idea of the book is that the more you know yourself and your body, the more you can adjust and adapt," he explains. "If health and illness are a spectrum, then functional medicine can move you along the spectrum toward health—where there is more vitality and your outer beauty is affected. But we all need guides. I'm hoping my book will be a manual on the journey to wellness." The cost of improving one's health and lifestyle to achieve balanced wellness? Effectively zero. —H.M.

