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Listen Closer

A Functional Nutrition Self-Inquiry Toolkit

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A note before you begin.

This guide is not medical advice. It is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any health condition. The information and tools contained here are educational in nature and are not a substitute for the guidance of a qualified healthcare provider, physician, or licensed medical professional.

If you are currently managing a diagnosed health condition, are pregnant or nursing, or are under the care of a healthcare provider, please consult with them before making significant changes to your diet or lifestyle.

The AI prompt tools included in Section 3 are offered as thinking and exploration aids. Responses generated by AI tools are not medical advice and should not be treated as such.

epi-g. functional nutrition counseling offers education and coaching meant to work in support of any medical interventions you are currently pursuing — not stand alone or as replacement medical treatment. Working through this guide does not establish a clinical or medical relationship.

Your health is yours. This guide is simply an invitation to understand it better.

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Section 1: How Your Body Talks

Your body is always communicating.

Not just in dramatic emergencies, but in the quiet, persistent language of everyday experience — the afternoon energy crash, the bloating that shows up uninvited, the sleep that never quite restores, the mood that shifts without an obvious reason. Most of us have learned to push past these signals, or assume they're just the cost of being busy and human.

They're not noise. They're information.

Functional nutrition starts here — with the belief that symptoms are the body's attempt at a conversation, and that the most useful thing we can do is learn to listen.

Let's keep it real.

There are no magic bullets here. No quick fixes, no universal protocols, no single food or supplement that will unravel years of accumulated signals your body has been sending.

What there is — and what this guide is designed to offer — is a starting point. A way to begin asking better questions, noticing clearer patterns, and building a foundation that makes everything else more effective.

Some people find that the basics move the needle significantly. Others discover that the basics reveal something deeper that needs more attention. Both are valid outcomes. Both are progress. Wellness is not a destination — it's a practice you return to, with curiosity and without judgment, for the long haul.

This guide is your first step into that practice. It won't do all the work. But it will help you begin to understand the work — and that changes everything.

Your genes are not your destiny.

This is where functional nutrition diverges from conventional thinking, and where everything else in this guide is rooted.

Think of your genes as roots — present from the beginning, carrying real potential and real tendencies. But roots don't grow in isolation. They grow in soil. The quality of that soil — what you eat, how you sleep, how you move, how you manage stress, the relationships and environments you inhabit — all offer signals to the roots to grow and flourish or stay buried.

This is the science of epigenetics: the study of how your daily choices and surroundings influence the way your genes actually express themselves. You were born with a specific set of roots. But the soil? That's largely within your influence.

Same genes. Smarter signals. Profoundly different outcomes.

You are not a fixed equation. You are a dynamic, responsive system of systems — with the power to effect change by choice.

Everything is connected. Everything counts.

The body doesn't operate in separate departments. Digestion, inflammation, hormones, brain function, immune response, mood, energy — these aren't independent systems running parallel tracks. They are in constant conversation with each other, and with the world outside your body.

When we look at health through a functional lens, we're not chasing isolated symptoms. We're looking for patterns. We're asking: where did this begin, and what else might be connected to it?

That's a different kind of question than most of us have been taught to ask — and it tends to lead somewhere more useful.

Digestion: where it almost always begins.

If epigenetics is the soil, digestion is the root system through which everything else is fed.

Your gut is responsible for far more than processing meals. It's where nutrients are absorbed and made available to every cell in your body. It houses roughly 70% of your immune system. It produces and regulates neurotransmitters — including most of your serotonin. It communicates directly with your brain through the vagus nerve in a relationship so significant it's called the gut-brain axis.

When digestion is compromised — whether through food sensitivities, an imbalanced microbiome, chronic stress, or simply years of inputs the body struggled to process — the effects ripple outward in ways that aren't always obviously digestive.

The more obvious signals that digestion may need attention:

- Irregular, inconsistent, or uncomfortable bowel habits
- Undigested food in stool
- Chronic indigestion, bloating, or gas
- Stools that are persistently and unusually odorous
- Feeling noticeably better when you don't eat

The less obvious signals — the ones that often get missed:

- Sleep that doesn't restore, or chronic difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Depression, anxiety, or mood instability without a clear cause
- Acne or other persistent skin issues
- Recurring migraines
- Autoimmune conditions
- Any chronic inflammatory symptoms — joint pain, fatigue, brain fog, frequent illness

None of these symptoms are exclusively digestive in origin. But all of them can have roots there. This is why functional nutrition almost always begins with digestion — not because it's always the complete answer, but because it's almost always part of the conversation.

Inflammation: signal, then problem.

Inflammation deserves a more nuanced introduction than it usually gets.

Acute inflammation is intelligent. It's your body's first responder — arriving when you're injured or fighting infection, doing its work, and standing down. That kind of inflammation is not the enemy.

Chronic, low-grade inflammation is a different story. When the inflammatory response never fully resolves — because of ongoing dietary stressors, poor sleep, unaddressed gut dysfunction, environmental exposures, or chronic psychological stress — it becomes a slow background fire. Over time, that fire is implicated in nearly every chronic condition we're familiar with: autoimmune disorders, metabolic dysfunction, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, and more.

The functional nutrition question isn't simply do you have inflammation — it's what is keeping the fire lit?

A note for those navigating autoimmunity

If autoimmune conditions are part of your picture, there's a framework worth knowing. Researcher and gastroenterologist Dr. Alessio Fasano describes autoimmunity as a three-legged stool — meaning three factors must be present simultaneously for an autoimmune condition to develop and persist: a genetic predisposition, an environmental or internal trigger, and intestinal permeability (commonly called leaky gut).

The important implication is this: you can't change your genes, but the other two legs are addressable. When you remove a trigger and begin healing the gut lining, the stool loses its ability to stand.

It's also worth knowing that deeper autoimmune support often benefits from one-on-one work. This guide is a meaningful starting point. It may not be the whole journey.

Hormones: your body's messaging system.

Hormones govern more of your daily experience than most people realize — energy, mood, weight, sleep, stress response, hunger, metabolism, libido, and cycles of all kinds.

What matters most here is this: hormones don't operate independently. They exist in relationship to each other, and to the systems we've already discussed. Chronic inflammation disrupts hormonal signaling. Poor gut health affects estrogen metabolism and thyroid function. Ongoing stress floods the body with cortisol, which over time suppresses other hormonal functions to compensate.

You can't effectively address a hormonal imbalance without also looking at what's feeding it upstream. This is the functional nutrition difference — we don't start at the hormone. We start at the root.

Lifestyle is biology.

This is one of the most important reframes in functional nutrition — and the one that gets the least respect in conventional wellness spaces.

Sleep is not a lifestyle preference or a productivity variable. It is a biological requirement during which your body repairs tissue, regulates hormones, consolidates memory, and clears metabolic waste from the brain. Chronic sleep disruption is physiologically equivalent to chronic stress. It is not negotiable.

Stress is not just a feeling. It is a cascade of hormonal and neurological events that, when sustained, affects digestion, immunity, inflammation, cardiovascular function, and cellular aging. How you manage — or don't manage — stress shows up in your body whether you acknowledge it or not.

Relationships and social connection have measurable effects on immune function, inflammatory markers, and longevity. Isolation is not a soft variable. It registers in the body as a stressor.

Movement — not as punishment or performance, but as signal — tells your body it is safe, capable, and alive. It regulates blood sugar, supports lymphatic flow, improves sleep quality, and modulates stress hormones. It doesn't have to be intense to be effective. It has to be consistent.

None of these are bonus points or aspirational extras. They are biological inputs. Your body is integrating all of it, all the time — whether or not you are paying attention.

This guide will ask you to start paying attention.

Where we go from here.

The sections that follow will help you do three things:

Understand your own pattern — using simple tracking tools and a framework for connecting your dots in plain language.

Build your foundation — addressing digestion, reducing the primary drivers of inflammation, and aligning your lifestyle basics so that everything else you do has a better chance of working.

Identify your next right step — whether that's continuing to work through this guide, adjusting your approach based on what you discover, or recognizing that a deeper dive with a practitioner is where your particular picture is pointing.

There's no single path through this. But there is a starting place — and you're already in it.

Section 2: Your Personal Inquiry

Self-Tracking Tools

The tools in this section aren't tests. There are no right answers, no grades, and nothing to pass or fail. They're simply a way of gathering your story in one place — so you can begin to see it more clearly.

Most of us carry our health history in pieces. A childhood illness here, a stressful season there, a symptom we've learned to work around. When we lay those pieces out together, patterns often emerge that weren't visible before. Connections we hadn't made. A timeline that starts to tell a story.

Work through them at your own pace. Be as detailed or as brief as feels right. You can always come back and add more. The goal isn't a perfect record — it's a starting point for paying attention. None of the frameworks or categories in this guide are meant to be the final word on your experience. They're starting points — references to think from, not boxes to think inside. Your body's signals and your own intuition are always the most important data in the room.

Tool 1: Your Health Story

Part A — The Soil You Grew Up In

Your genes are your roots. But the soil those roots grew in — the health environment of your early life, your family's patterns, the exposures and experiences that shaped your biology before you had any say in it — matters enormously. This isn't about blame or determinism. It's about context.

Take a few minutes to reflect on the following. Write as much or as little as you know.

Your family health picture

What health conditions or patterns show up on your mother's side of the family?

What health conditions or patterns show up on your father's side of the family?

This is just the beginning.

You've seen the starting point. Here's what's waiting inside the full toolkit.

Listen Closer: A Functional Nutrition Self-Inquiry Toolkit

- Section 1** How Your Body Talks — the full functional nutrition framework, including epigenetics, digestion, inflammation, hormones, and lifestyle-as-biology.
- Section 2** Four complete self-tracking tools: your full Health Story (Parts A & B with personal timeline), the 8-domain Body Systems Check-In, your Current Snapshot, and a guided 5-Day Body Awareness Journal — plus a worked example to show you how it all comes together.
- Section 3** A 5-prompt AI companion set (ready to copy into Claude or ChatGPT) to help you read your own patterns, plus plain-language symptom cluster guidance — no diagnosis, just direction.
- Section 4** A complete two-phase plan: the foundational elimination + addition protocol, three non-negotiables, and system-by-system support for digestion, inflammation, blood sugar, sleep, stress, and hormones.
- Section 5** A self-assessment to find your next right step, guidance on when to seek one-on-one support, and a closing reflection to carry forward.

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Thank you for taking this first step toward a practice that's truly your own.

Keep listening.

— monica g.

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