
Introduction to Functional Nutrition

Functional nutrition is about finding the right way for each of us to eat—using food to maximize the potential for health and reverse dysfunction or disease. There is no single “right diet” that applies to everyone. We have different genetic backgrounds, different preferences, and different lives. We all want to be healthy, but many of us haven’t figured out exactly how to make food and dietary patterns serve that goal. Functional nutrition offers the concepts, strategies, and tools to make that happen.

Functional Nutrition Fundamentals

For untold centuries, humans have relied on the food supply as a source of energy, health, and connection. However, over the last several decades, changes in the food supply (and in how we use it) have contributed strongly to the growing epidemic of chronic disease. Functional nutrition developed out of a desire on the part of healthcare providers to change that picture.

Emerging science is very clear that food is a powerful influence on health. Food offers not only the calories that fuel our body’s metabolism (engine), but it also contains many diverse components that play important roles in all our bodily functions. Poor-quality food can create disease, and high-quality food (in the right proportions and amounts) can reverse disease and sustain health. In a very real sense, food is **medicine!**

How Food Affects Our Health

There are three basic elements in foods:

- **Macronutrients:** the proteins, fats, and carbohydrates that are the building blocks of all food
- **Micronutrients:** vitamins and minerals
- **Phytonutrients:** substances in plants that have a positive effect on health

The abundance of processed foods has negatively impacted our nutrition and health. Food manufacturing practices like stripping whole grains of their fiber, adding sweeteners and excessive salt to foods, and applying toxic chemicals to agriculture can have a negative impact on our health. When processed foods are eaten regularly, they can make us sick.

Food is **information**, not just energy or calories. Food tells our bodies how to function by signaling when and how each type of cell should behave in every situation. So, we want the very best information to reach our cells to help achieve optimal functioning.

Food also represents **connection**. Food connects us when we prepare and eat together and enjoy celebrations or ceremonies, affirming cultural bonds.

How Does Functional Nutrition Work?

Functional nutrition emphasizes healthful eating personalized to your genetics, lifestyle, environment, and health concerns. Functional nutrition offers strategies and tools to improve your health, including recipes, cooking, and food storage recommendations, plus steps to achieve mindful eating.

When you work with a functional nutrition practitioner to help you understand and implement your personalized food plan, you will have access to a wealth of information to help you adopt a new approach to food and nutrition. Your provider will also determine if other interventions are needed.

Changing eating behaviors isn't easy, even if you are well-informed about what to do. There will be ups and downs. But, unlike a diet, these changes are not harsh restrictions on your eating, and they do not involve counting calories or depriving yourself of delicious food. They are scientifically sound approaches that can benefit you for a lifetime! Just start with the following basic concepts: **eat fresh, eat color, eat texture**, and (from bestselling author Michael Pollan) **eat real food, not too much, mostly plants**.

Welcome to functional nutrition. It is the best way to harness the energy, information, and connections of food to create health and reverse disease!

FOOD IS:

