BASIC TESTS

Used in Functional Medicine

Testing allows doctors to gain a perspective on how well the body is doing its job. Just as a mechanic might hook your car up to a diagnostic computer to get more information, a medical doctor will peer at your blood, urine, and sometimes even stool to get more data points to plot a plan of action. A functional-medicine workup will often include the basics (cholesterol screening, lipid panel, white blood cell count), plus several more tests.

Most functional-medicine practitioners use a handful of labs that are usually considered out-of-network by insurance companies. The upshot? Patients must pay up front and in full. Afterward, however, you can submit a claim to your insurance company in hopes of full or partial coverage. According to the Internal Revenue Service, a health savings account may be used to pay for lab fees if they are considered part of medical care. So, if your functional-medicine practitioner is a licensed physician, you might go this route.

Prices below are approximate (costs can vary greatly between clinicians), but they are in the ballpark. Here's what to expect:

IgG ELISA Food Antibodies: This blood test assesses IgG antibodies for 87 combined foods, including gluten. The aim is to pinpoint food allergies and sensitivities that may be disrupting digestion and opening the door to autoimmune disorders and other inflammatory diseases. (Cost: $200)

Organic Acids Test: Organic acids are urinary markers of metabolism. This urine test looks at issues related to mitochondria, B-vitamin deficiency, detoxification, and more. (Cost: $300)

Thyroid-Stimulating Hormone: The pituitary gland secretes thyroid-stimulating hormones (TSH for short) to help the body regulate — you guessed it — the thyroid. Many people suffer from either overactive or underactive thyroid. This blood test will give your provider a sense of your overall hormonal health. (Cost: $200)

Digestive Stool Analysis: Used primarily to identify gastrointestinal disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome and inflammatory bowel disease, this test also reveals the health of the gut's ecology (good and bad bacteria levels). The analysis detects yeast, parasites, and toxins that cause antibiotic-associated diarrhea. (Cost: $425)

Saliva Hormone Testing: This test measures levels of the hormones progesterone, testosterone, and estradiol over 28 days. The aim is to look for imbalances that cause fertility problems as well as disruptions in mood, sleep, and appetite. (Cost: $200)

Intestinal Permeability Assessment: This urine test measures whether or not the lining of the small intestine is too permeable, thereby allowing toxins into the bloodstream, or, conversely, has decreased permeability, causing malnutrition and malabsorption. Patients drink a substance made up of two nonmetabolized sugars, lactulose and mannitol, and then submit a urine sample. This information is assessed to see how much of the substance passed through the small intestine and how much leached through the mucosal barrier. (Cost: $130)

Urine Toxic-Metals Test: Heavy metals in the environment can enter the body through air, water, and food. Once inside, they can cause a host of ills. This urine test requires the patient to drink a chelating agent (a substance that binds to heavy metals and moves them out of the body through urine). Over a six- to 24-hour period, urine is collected and sent to the lab to be screened for lead, mercury, cadmium, and other heavy metals. (Cost: $160)