

# A Functional Medicine Approach to Cognitive Decline

In my opinion, there is nothing more disconcerting than realizing you or a loved one is experiencing cognitive decline. It starts innocently enough, occasionally forgetting where you put your keys. However, year after year, you notice that you are becoming more and more forgetful. Simple calculations that you could easily perform become more difficult. Routine tasks that you used to do on autopilot, now need to be planned out, step-by-step. Friends and loved ones may be telling you that you are repeating yourself. Dates, names and places become more difficult to recall.

Almost everyone knows someone who has struggled with this issue. I do not need to tell you that watching your loved one slowly forget you is one of the most difficult things that any family can endure. Many feel helpless and hopeless as the decline worsens. Alzheimer's, dementia and generalized cognitive decline are becoming more and more widespread and are striking at younger and younger ages. The medical community does not have much to offer except for pharmaceuticals that may or may not slow the decline, and generally do not reverse this process. So what other options are there?

Functional medicine has a very interesting approach to testing for and treating cognitive decline. The earlier intervention occurs, the easier it is to correct imbalances before they become permanent. For the majority of people, the first insult to the brain comes when they go through a prolonged period of chronic stress. This looks different for every person, but basically, when you are in the non-stop fight-or-flight mode for weeks, months or even years, the brain becomes negatively impacted. Stress hormones flood the brain. The brain chemicals become imbalanced and forgetfulness, brain fog, anxiety and/or depression start to be an issue.

At the same time the brain is becoming impacted, the digestive system also becomes impacted from chronic stress. The protective lining of the gut starts to erode leaving you open to bacterial, viral, fungal or parasitic infections. Most of you have heard of the gut/brain connection. An infection in the digestive tract can have major negative consequences on the brain, including brain inflammation. If the stress and gut infection are allowed to continue, the symptoms of cognitive decline start to progress.



In the functional medicine approach to cognitive decline, we do some testing to determine exactly how the body is functioning and where the breakdown is occurring. The first test is a salivary adrenal test that you perform at home over the course of one day. This test looks at how your body is handling stress. We can tell if you have a normal stress response, or if you had prolonged stress that has led to adrenal fatigue or exhaustion.

The second test looks at your gut health. You send a stool sample into the lab and we get a wonderfully detailed report telling us if you have any chronic infections that are potentially leading to brain inflammation. This is a PCR test that looks at the DNA of 4 pages of "critters". This test helps us to find the source of hidden inflammation that can lead to a multitude of concerning brain symptoms. The third test is an at home urine test that measures organic acid levels. This is one of my favorite tests because it looks at the levels of the four things that eventually will kill us; inflammation, catabolic physiology, insulin resistance and oxidative stress. For the purpose of this article, we will focus on the gut, brain and liver sections of this test. There are markers that look at how the gut is affecting the brain. We also get to see the neurotransmitter levels of epinephrine, norepinephrine, dopamine and serotonin. Other markers show us the extent of inflammation in the brain and the amount of oxidative damage that could be affecting the brain cells.

We will also be able to see how the liver is functioning. Many of us have high pesticide and heavy metal levels which very quickly can kill brain cells. Once this information is compiled we have a clear picture where the major insult to the brain is coming from.

The treatment plan is based on these test results and is customized to every person. I am very happy to tell you, that treatment consists of vitamins and minerals. Our goal is to get in, correct how the body is functioning, and then get out. We do not use toxic drugs that you need to be on for the rest of your life or that may damage your liver or kidneys or cause unwanted side effects.

It is so gratifying to see the look of surprise and happiness when someone comes in after a few months of treatment and says their memory and mood has improved. The brain fog has lifted. That they can perform tasks without having to think about every single step. I know it is hard to believe that stress and digestive tract infections can have such a huge impact on our brain, but it is true.

What could be more important than your brain? I know you don't want to become a burden to your family or forget them and the wonderful life you have had together. There is no time to wait. As with anything, the longer you wait, the harder it becomes to reverse damage that may have had time to become permanent.

If you want to figure out WHY you are experiencing cognitive decline, I encourage you to make a functional medicine appointment today. If you want to treat using essential nutrients instead of chemicals, I encourage you to make an appointment today.



Schedule online at  
[www.AcupunctureSolutionsOnline.com](http://www.AcupunctureSolutionsOnline.com)  
 or call (239) 260-4566.

Telemedicine visits are available.  
 Let's figure out exactly where your body is breaking down and correct it. Once the body is functioning properly, unwanted symptoms slowly disappear and cognitive function improves.