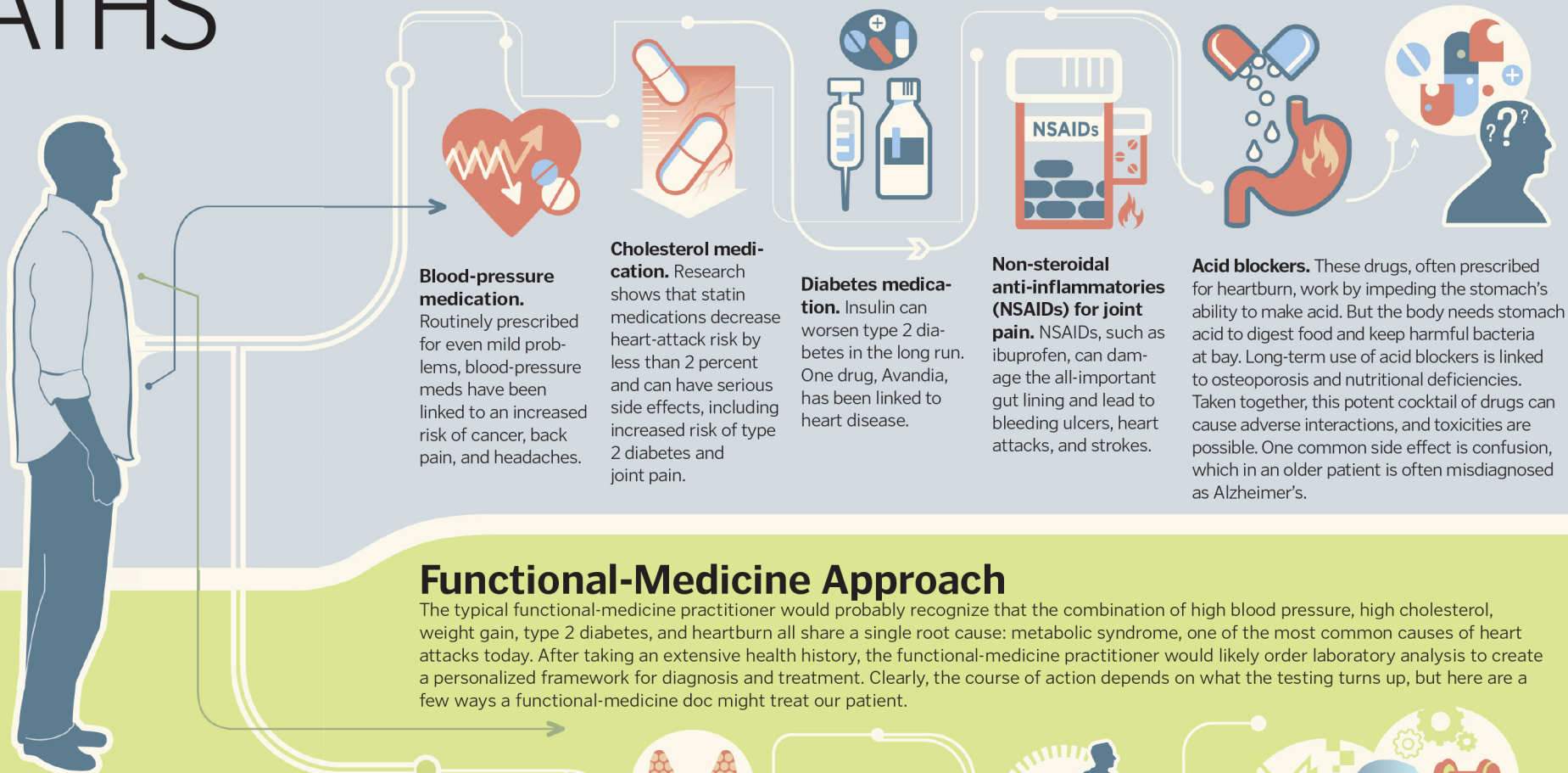


TWO PATHS

Conventional-Medicine Approach

When it comes to acute trauma, like a broken leg, or infectious diseases, such as malaria, conventional medicine is incomparable. Not so when it comes to the epidemic of chronic disease. “The structure of medical-school curriculum hasn’t changed in more than half a century,” says the American Medical Association’s James Madara, MD. “Caring for this new population requires an entirely different mindset.” Confronted with our hypothetical patient’s set of symptoms, many conventional docs would certainly consider lifestyle-based solutions. But their primary treatment would most likely be a drug-centered approach, breaking the larger problem into individual components and treating each issue with a separate medication. This strategy is accepted and supported by health-insurance and pharmaceutical companies.

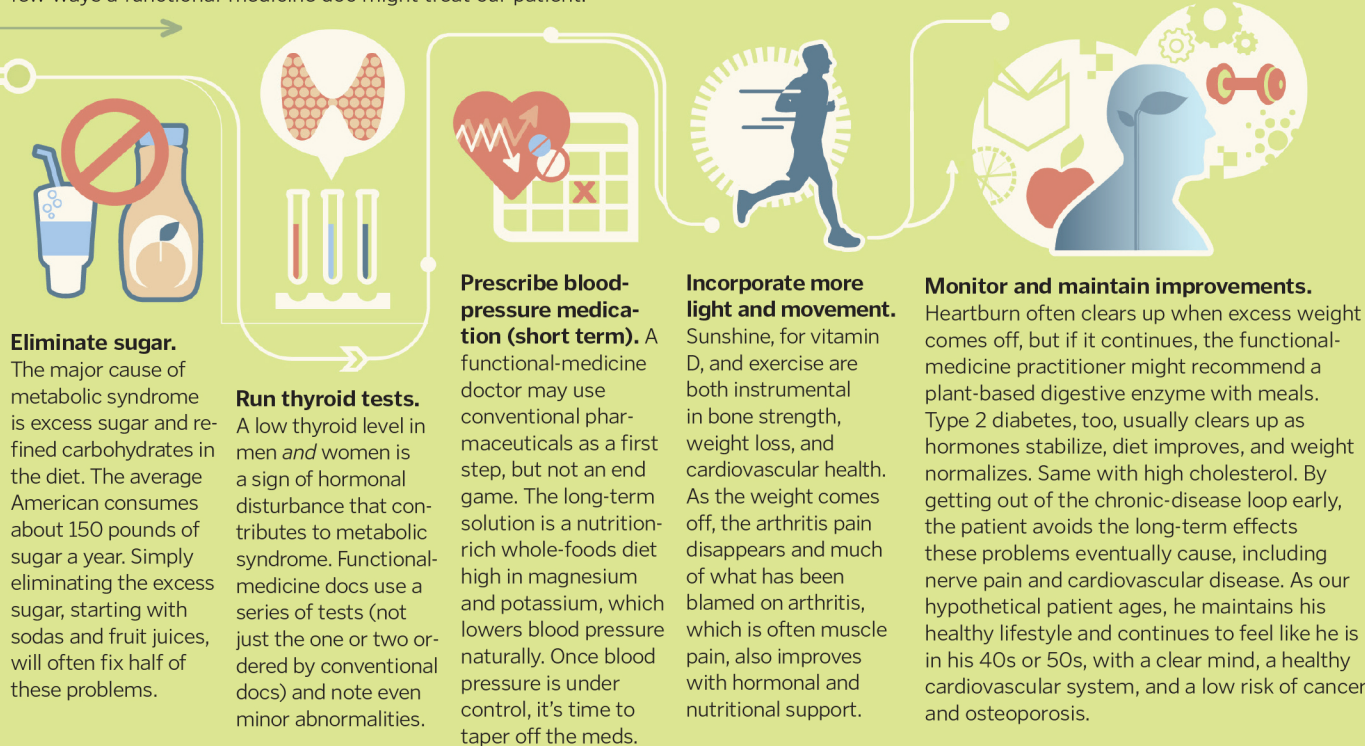


Functional-Medicine Approach

The typical functional-medicine practitioner would probably recognize that the combination of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and heartburn all share a single root cause: metabolic syndrome, one of the most common causes of heart attacks today. After taking an extensive health history, the functional-medicine practitioner would likely order laboratory analysis to create a personalized framework for diagnosis and treatment. Clearly, the course of action depends on what the testing turns up, but here are a few ways a functional-medicine doc might treat our patient.

Meet our hypothetical patient.

In his 50s, he is struggling with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heartburn, joint pain, and type 2 diabetes — an all-too-typical list of issues. So, how would he fare at a typical conventional doctor’s office versus a functional-medicine doctor’s office? Here are some key differences.



Eliminate sugar.

The major cause of metabolic syndrome is excess sugar and refined carbohydrates in the diet. The average American consumes about 150 pounds of sugar a year. Simply eliminating the excess sugar, starting with sodas and fruit juices, will often fix half of these problems.

Run thyroid tests.

A low thyroid level in men and women is a sign of hormonal disturbance that contributes to metabolic syndrome. Functional-medicine docs use a series of tests (not just the one or two ordered by conventional docs) and note even minor abnormalities.

Prescribe blood-pressure medication (short term).

A functional-medicine doctor may use conventional pharmaceuticals as a first step, but not an end game. The long-term solution is a nutrition-rich whole-foods diet high in magnesium and potassium, which lowers blood pressure naturally. Once blood pressure is under control, it’s time to taper off the meds.

Incorporate more light and movement.

Sunshine, for vitamin D, and exercise are both instrumental in bone strength, weight loss, and cardiovascular health. As the weight comes off, the arthritis pain disappears and much of what has been blamed on arthritis, which is often muscle pain, also improves with hormonal and nutritional support.

Monitor and maintain improvements.

Heartburn often clears up when excess weight comes off, but if it continues, the functional-medicine practitioner might recommend a plant-based digestive enzyme with meals. Type 2 diabetes, too, usually clears up as hormones stabilize, diet improves, and weight normalizes. Same with high cholesterol. By getting out of the chronic-disease loop early, the patient avoids the long-term effects these problems eventually cause, including nerve pain and cardiovascular disease. As our hypothetical patient ages, he maintains his healthy lifestyle and continues to feel like he is in his 40s or 50s, with a clear mind, a healthy cardiovascular system, and a low risk of cancer and osteoporosis.