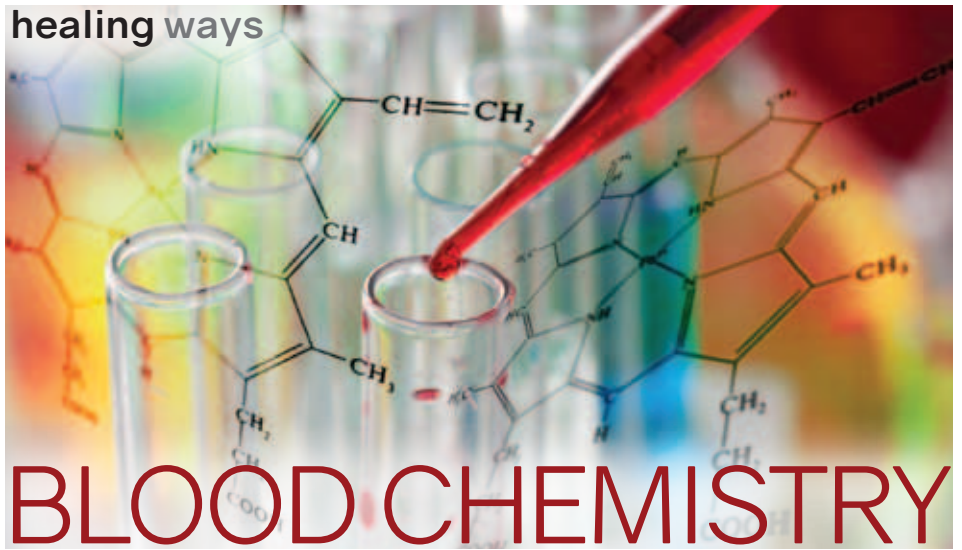


healing ways



# BLOOD CHEMISTRY

## A New Roadmap to Better Health

by Linda Sechrist

**G**ood detectives trained in the art of investigation know not only how to look for, collect and interpret evidence, but also how to use the tools that can help them solve a mystery. With the right tool, such as a comprehensive functional blood chemistry analysis, an experienced practitioner trained in systems biology examines the body's metabolic blueprint, unravelling the enigma of declining health hijacked by chronic disease.

Holistic health practitioners like Kristin Grayce McGary, of Boulder, Colorado, use these skills to provide clients with sound recommendations, screen for health issues and monitor changes as needed. "This kind of sleuthing is what sets us apart," says McGary.

### Pathological Versus Functional

The results of a blood test are essential to understanding anyone's current state of health. No other screenings are more efficient and effective than the comprehensive blood chemistry panels used by functional medicine and holistic health practitioners to establish a baseline of biomarkers for tracking an individual's health and nutritional needs.

In the field of blood chemistry analysis, there are two main types of reference ranges—pathological and functional. The

pathological range is used by the majority of conventionally trained medical doctors that are focused on diagnosing disease. The functional range is used to assess risk for disease before it develops, says McGary.

"It is critical that you find a holistic and intelligent doctor skilled in functional medicine," says Boulder-based Suzy Cohen, a registered pharmacist and author of *Drug Muggers: Which Medications Are Robbing Your Body of Essential Nutrients—and Natural Ways to Restore Them*. "Working with a functional medicine practitioner, as well as a local trusted pharmacist who has access to your medication regimen and sensitivities, is the safest way to regain health."

It also saves money, because choosing the best supplements, herbal extracts, essential oils, dietary changes and other non-pharmaceutical healing modalities allows for healing faster, she says.

Conventional practitioners, constrained by insurance company requirements, generally order simple blood panels with basic markers for heart, kidney and liver function. These might include reference ranges for hemoglobin, platelets, glucose, calcium and electrolytes. "The baseline lab panel that I prefer for patients has 68 markers, plus a urinalysis. This means that I get five or six full pages of results, which gives me a more in-depth insight into someone's health," McGary says.

## A Better Roadmap to Health

McGary considers the most important differences between the interpretation of functional and conventional markers to be the statistically compiled range of values that functional practitioners consider normal and the interconnections taken into consideration during the comprehensive analysis.

“Conventional reference ranges are compiled by laboratories from a huge population of people, many of whom had their blood analyzed because they were already sick. Functional reference ranges are compiled from a much smaller population of healthy people whose bodies are functioning optimally,” she says.

If a marker falls inside the tighter functional range, it’s a green flag that compares favorably with healthy individuals. If a marker falls outside the wider conventional range, it’s a red flag that correlates to sick people. The marker that falls in-between is a yellow flag.

“Functional practitioners are looking for yellow flags, which are the early warning signs that no one sees or feels yet as symptoms,” explains McGary, who spends more than two hours reviewing the blood analyses with clients. “We’re not only about prevention and achieving vibrant health—which we do by helping clients choose the best supplements to correct deficiencies—we’re also about helping individuals get to the root cause of their health challenge so that they can enjoy life.”

Functional blood chemistry analysis is not generally covered by health insurance, and can cost between \$180 and \$2,500, depending on the complexity of the panel, the number of markers ordered and the time spent by a practitioner in consultation and interpretation of results.

However, the out-of-pocket cost may be worth it, says Cohen. “In health, sometimes you get what you pay for. You don’t want to be somebody’s number and pushed out the door,” she says. “It’s important to feel like you have been listened to and that your entire medical history has been fully evaluated.”

*Linda Sechrist is a senior staff writer for Natural Awakenings.*