

DIAGNOSTIC WHIZ
No one is a lost cause to Dr. John Salerno, who focuses on discovering root causes of illness while treating the whole person and not just the symptom.



Journey to Wellness

A HEALTHY PATH THROUGH PERSONALIZED MEDICAL CARE

Each day, I woke up feeling like I had run a triathlon the day before. My joints hurt, my muscles burned, I was achy and tired. I experienced chronic pain every single day and every single night. For years. What was going on with my body? Why was it betraying me?

Eleven years ago, I stood on the landing and started to cry because I couldn't figure out how I was going to get up the six stairs to my bedroom. My young son said, "Don't worry Mommy," took me by the hand and led me up the stairs. My husband, who had already tested positive for Lyme and a host of other tick-borne diseases, urged me to see a specialist. Soon I was on a three-month course of antibiotics, which alleviated some of the worst symptoms. I was cured! Or so I thought.

Certain symptoms persisted and new ones cropped up. It became clear that something was very wrong. But what? I consulted a battalion of doctors and specialists, presenting each of them with a neatly typed list of my bizarre and inconclusive symptoms.

I was variously tested for and/or diagnosed with Lyme disease, post Lyme fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, Hashimoto's, hypothyroidism, and Sjögren's syndrome. I became pre-diabetic. Doctors continued to prescribe a cornucopia of drugs. Nothing helped except prednisone, which is an effective but pernicious steroidal drug you cannot take long term because of the awful side effects (eroded bones, hair loss, weakened immune system, and a hunchback). I was told that I had a "non-specific auto-immune disease," which basically means something is wildly off-kilter, but no one can tell you exactly what it is or how to treat it. Maddening.

The information I was given was contradictory and confusing: go gluten free, go dairy free, eat nuts, don't eat nuts, go low carb/high protein, go high fiber/low protein, eat a plant-based diet, eat lectin-free foods, avoid nightshades, eat fruit, don't eat fruit, take vitamins, don't take vitamins because they could cause liver toxicity.

BY MEGAN SMITH-HARRIS // PHOTOGRAPH BY DOUGLAS FOULKE

What's in a Name?

A primer to get you started and on your own path to wellness.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE practices used in place of conventional medicine and medical care. Includes Chinese medicine, homeopathy, herbalism, chiropractic, and Ayurvedic medicine.

COMPLEMENTARY / HOLISTIC MEDICINE therapeutic techniques are used in tandem with mainstream medicine. Can include yoga, meditation, massage, Reiki, qi gong, acupuncture, osteopathy, music therapy, hypnosis etc.

FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE patient-centered approach similar to integrative medicine—takes the whole person and their lifestyle into account. Also examines the biochemical individuality of a patient, specifically genetic and environmental uniqueness that might lead to health issues. Personalized medical care designed for optimal health.

INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE treats the whole person and not just the disease. Looks at lifestyle and nutritional choices. Offers both complementary and mainstream care, believes health is more than the absence of disease.

NATUROPATHIC MEDICINE emphasizes prevention and self-healing through the use of natural therapies. Utilizes many different modalities including nutrition, herbal remedies, homeopathy, exercise, massage etc.

My body felt completely inflamed, and yet my inflammation factor registered in the normal range. I was a mystery that no one wanted to solve.

One doctor listened to my medical history, smiled, and told me that perhaps I just needed to accept the fact that I was getting older. Seriously? Accept not being able to walk up my driveway to the mailbox? Accept constant pain? Absolutely not. I knew that someone, somewhere would be able to put the pieces of the puzzle together and figure out how to make me well.

I had tried everything that conventional medicine had to offer, and it was only making me sicker. I decided it was time to investigate other options. Integrative medicine appealed to me because the patient was treated as a whole and complementary therapies were embraced.

When I first consulted with Dr. John Salerno of the Salerno Wellness Center in Fairfield (he also has a long-standing practice in New York), I was polite but secretly skeptical. I'd been down this path many times before with so many doctors, and gotten exactly nowhere. However, there was a very small part of me that remained hopeful. Maybe this doctor would unravel the enigma that was me?

Dr. Salerno is affable, smart, and he really listens. The man is like a symptom detective who analyzes your medical history and works systematically to find the root causes. Over the years, he has treated and cured thousands of patients who present with a host of different conditions. He is a whiz at diagnosis. Dr. Salerno predicted what my blood work would reveal, and he was 100 percent right.

My hormones were a disaster—low estrogen, low progesterone, and testosterone so minimal that the lab could barely measure it. Apparently prolonged use of prednisone diminishes hormonal levels. Who knew? My adrenal glands were in dis-

stress, and my thyroid numbers were sub-optimal despite the fact I was under the care of an endocrinologist who had told me they were "fine." Thanks to the frequent use of antiperspirant, I also had high levels of aluminum in my blood. And arsenic. Arsenic? Apparently rice and wine are to blame. I can give up rice, but wine? Dr. Salerno encouraged me to adopt a low carb lifestyle and to choose organic wines. My vitamin D, C, and B were deficient but my iron and cortisol levels fine.

Dr. Salerno looked at me and said possibly the nicest thing any doctor can say to a patient: "It's not your fault." I almost wept. I was so grateful to be absolved of responsibility for my health woes, to not be judged. He gave me a list of supplements to take and prescriptions for bioidentical hormones to get filled at a compounding pharmacy. He tweaked my thyroid meds and customized IV treatments specifically for me (Dr. Salerno has 36 proprietary IVs for every ailment and condition imaginable).

Not everyone believes in using this approach to wellness, but all I can tell you, is that I am a convert. Within six weeks of following a plan designed to balance my thyroid function, shore up my vitamin deficiencies, and stabilize my hormones, I felt and looked a lot better. I dropped almost eight pounds with very little effort—something that has never happened to me before. The chronic muscle pain that plagued me 24/7 for years has diminished by 90 percent. My rosacea is tamed, food sensitivities have abated, and I no longer wake up at 3:07 am, unable to fall back asleep. My blood sugar and insulin levels are all normal. Buh-bye pre-diabetes! Am I running marathons? No. I am cycling, swimming, and once again able to walk up our long drive to the mailbox. Functional medicine may not be for everybody, but it is the right choice for me. ■

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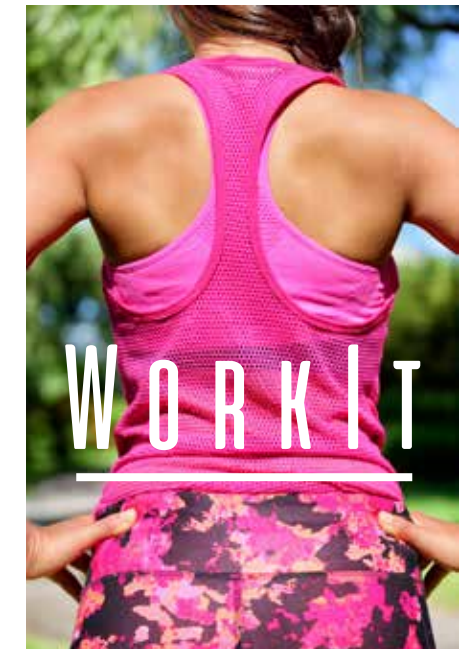


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