

Diagnosing and Treating Environmentally Acquired Illness (EAI)

We hear a lot these days about the environment – most of it focusing on the long-term rise in the average temperature of the Earth's climate system. Seemingly lost among the talk (and debate – over the causes of global warming) is one simple fact that's hard to ignore. Unless you live in a bubble, you are being bombarded by toxins and infectious agents that could result in you contracting an *environmentally acquired illness*.

Environmentally acquired illness (EAI) is characterized by any of a number of illnesses or syndromes (symptom clusters) caused by exposure to toxic molds and other biotoxins; toxic chemicals such as heavy metals and pesticides; and persistent infections, such as Lyme disease. Environmental toxins are in foods and beverages, furniture, carpets, clothing, cleaning products, cosmetics, personal hygiene products, medications, and the air around us. In addition, you can acquire serious and persistent infections from insect bites and not even know it, and your home or workplace may be a source of toxic mold that you're breathing in every time you inhale.



Although your body is equipped with various systems to cure infections and eliminate toxins, the volume and diversity of infectious agents and toxins often overwhelms the body's defenses.

The bigger problem with environmentally acquired illness is that the conventional medical system is poorly equipped to deal with it for several reasons:

- Conventional medicine is built on a system of “expert guidelines” used to diagnose and treat specific recognized illnesses, not including environmentally acquired illness, so very few conventional medical doctors consider the possibility of EAI. **In other words, they can't find what they're not looking for.**
- Conventional medical doctors may actually be punished professionally for thinking outside the box and recognizing environmentally acquired illness or any other health conditions outside the limited scope of conventional medicine.

- Environmentally acquired illness causes a variety of illnesses and syndromes recognized by conventional medicine, including chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), fibromyalgia, allergies, asthma, sinusitis, colitis, arthritis, dermatitis, certain forms of dementia, and so forth. Most of these illnesses involve inflammation, and the cause of that inflammation is often EAI. Conventional doctors often stop at the diagnosis and treatment of these recognized conditions, failing to dig deeper to identify and treat the underlying EAI.
- Multiple biological systems are typically involved in environmentally acquired illness, including the immune, digestive, endocrine, nervous, renal, skeletal, and respiratory, systems. **Because conventional medicine has specialists for each system, practitioners rarely, if ever, consider root causes of illness that affect multiple systems or the interactions among these systems.**
- Conventional medical doctors often have conflicts of interest financed by large and powerful pharmaceutical and insurance companies. These doctors are not rewarded for spending the time required to dig deeper into a patient's diagnosis. They actually are rewarded for spending less time with patients, so they prescribe quick fixes and refer patients to specialists who are trained to deal with highly specific symptoms and illnesses. As a result, the root causes are never addressed.

Playing Whac-A-Mole

Have you ever played Whac-A-Mole at an arcade or amusement park? The game has five mole heads that pop up randomly out of holes in the game console while you attempt to whack them with a padded mallet. You earn points for each mole you whack.

The way most conventional doctors address chronic illnesses is

like playing Whac-A-Mole. When a patient presents with a certain cluster of symptoms, the doctor finds the available diagnosis that most closely fits and then treats that illness or syndrome or refers the patient to a specialist. The cause of the illness is never identified or treated, so the condition persists, or the underlying cause produces a different health condition that is related but may not appear to be so. For example, a patient may receive treatment for allergies and then, three years later, develop arthritis or colitis because the underlying cause of the inflammation was never addressed.

Even worse is when a doctor cannot clearly identify a specific illness, so he or she offers a [waste-basket diagnosis](#), such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, or depression. These diagnoses and others like them are the equivalent of a doctor saying to you *"I have no idea what's going on"* or *"I can't find anything wrong with you."* The doctor then prescribes a medication to make the patient feel better, but one that only masks the symptoms; it does nothing to restore health and may even further deteriorate the person's health.

A Better Way: Restoring Health with Functional Integrative Medicine

At BioDesign Wellness Center in Tampa, we take a different approach to environmentally acquired illness (EAI) – an approach best described as functional and integrative:

- **Functional medicine:** Focuses on identifying and addressing the root cause of disease and restoring healthy function to all biological systems in the body down to the cellular level.
- **Integrative medicine:** A holistic approach that uses a combination of treatment modalities, including yoga, acupuncture, massage, stress reduction, and diet and

lifestyle changes.

Both functional and integrative medicine focus on treating the patient. Their objective is to restore health by addressing the root causes of illness that not only alleviate symptoms but set the patient up for long-term health benefits and a better quality of life.

We begin by thoroughly examining a patient's history for clues. For example, if you live or work in a building that has experienced water damage (as nearly 50 percent of all buildings in the U.S. have at one point or another), we know mold or biotoxins may be contributing to certain symptoms. Likewise, if you complain of digestive issues, imbalances in gut microbes may be a factor. We also consider history of infections, medication use, physical and emotional stress, lifestyle and nutrition, sleep (quantity and quality), travel, and other factors.

Based on the initial clues, doctors at our [Tampa Functional Medicine practice](#) are likely to order a number of tests to confirm or rule out possible underlying causes. Tests may look at toxic load, markers for inflammation, an imbalance in gut microbes, antibodies to various infectious agents, hormone levels, nutritional deficiencies, genetics, and so on. We want to know not only what's going on at the macro level (what we can observe with the naked eye) but also at the micro level (which can only be seen in lab test results), so we have the entire picture of what's going on with you and, more importantly, why.

When we fully understand the underlying causes of a patient's illness, we can construct a personalized treatment plan, which may include one or more of the following:

- Methods for reducing exposure to environmental toxins
- Nutritional supplements and/or dietary changes
- Lifestyle adjustments, such as changes in activity levels

or exercise (too much or too little exercise or the wrong types of exercise can cause problems)

- Stress reduction
- Medically supervised liver and GI detox
- Heavy metal testing and detox for mercury, cadmium, lead
- Addressing food intolerances and sensitivities
- Restoring a healthy balance of gut microbes
- Supplements for reducing inflammation
- Hormone balancing with [bioidentical hormone therapy](#)
- Pharmaceutical medications (we may recommend taking certain medications and stopping or reducing others)

Take the First Step toward Being Happy and Healthy Again

If you are not feeling your best and are frustrated with conventional diagnosis and treatments, please take the first step toward feeling better by scheduling an initial consultation with one of our doctors (*our customer experience manager, Lori, can help you set up your first appointment – call her at (813) 445-7770*).

Don't accept anything less than feeling your best, which is directly related to your happiness. If your doctor cannot explain the underlying cause of whatever is ailing you or makes you feel as though it is "all in your head," obtain a second, third, fourth, or fifth opinion until you find someone who understands Environmentally Acquired Illness (EAI).

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