



PATHWAY TO VITALITY

My journey to healing through functional medicine.

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Pathway to Vitality: My journey to healing
through functional medicine.

by
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My Goal





Chapter One

Entrenched



Entrenched

I followed the conventional medical approach because it offered the least resistance.

All my life I have been a very active and health conscious person. I was an athlete in high school and college. As an adult I continued to lead a very active lifestyle. I also ate a healthy diet...or so I thought! But things began to change.

About 20 years ago, I went out for Mexican food, our Friday night routine. Later that night I woke up in extreme pain. My wife drove me to the emergency room and I told them I thought I had appendicitis. After a very long night and multiple tests, I was told I had an infection and sent home with a prescription. On the drive home, my appendix ruptured and I ended up spending 10 days in the hospital and then 30 days on antibiotics to treat the infection, followed by surgery. Prior to this, the only gastrointestinal symptoms I had experienced was a little mild reflux.

Over the next year, I thought I had developed an allergy to some foods as I noticed it was worse when I ate certain things and I never really experienced the classic symptoms of reflux. My primary complaints were that I would feel exhausted and sometimes experience nausea first thing in the morning. I mentioned this to my primary care physician and he immediately gave me a prescription for Nexium. This medication resulted in an almost immediate and significant improvement in my symptoms.



I took the Nexium for a few weeks and experienced complete relief. After a few weeks of treatment my doctor decided it was time to stop the Nexium. Unfortunately, each time I tried to discontinue the medication, the reflux would return. As a result, my doctor ordered a barium test and the results showed I had a hiatal hernia. His response was to leave me on the Nexium indefinitely.

This treatment worked well for about two years, until one day I started to experience even more significant reflux, even on the medication. As a result, I was referred to a gastroenterologist for further evaluation. After undergoing an upper endoscopy, I was told I had Barrett's esophagus (this is believed to be a precancerous change in the cells of the esophagus) and I would be required to stay on proton pump inhibitors (like Nexium) for the rest of my life. Additionally, they would need to continue to perform endoscopies to monitor the changes in the cells of the esophagus.

Unfortunately, at this point, even the Nexium was not working. In an effort to control the reflux, the GI doctor put me on a different proton pump inhibitor called Aciphex. When this did not work, he suggested I take it twice daily; normal dosage is once daily. Upon taking one tablet in the morning and one in the evening, my reflux was once again under control.

Fast forward another year, and my reflux was back. Can you guess what my doctor's solution was this time? If you guessed more medication, you are right! He suggested I take one Aciphex in the morning, another at night and add Zantac 300mg at bedtime. And guess what, the reflux went away!

As long as I stayed on this acid suppressing medication and followed all the recommendations to manage GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) like not overeating, not eating late, elevating the head of the bed, avoiding fatty food, caffeine and alcohol, etc., I was able to manage the reflux. I was stuck – entrenched – in a devolving cycle of treatment making me worse.



Chapter Two

Exhausted



Exhausted

A crippling loss of function began in one seemingly isolated area in my body and spread uncontrollably.


Over the next couple years, I managed the symptoms fairly well. However, by this time I had multiple instances where I experienced severe chest pain which landed me in the emergency room. In each case, after an extensive cardiac workup, I was told I was experiencing esophageal spasms. Each time I asked why, I was told it was probably due to the hiatal hernia and nothing to worry about. I was told to just keep taking the acid suppressing medications and I could always consider surgery to correct the hiatal hernia if it gets too bad.

So what next?...You guessed it...The problems returned! This time I not only had reflux, but I was experiencing severe stomach pain, difficulty swallowing, and extreme phlegm in the throat. I decided it was time to see different GI doctor. I searched the web and found one with excellent credentials. He did another endoscopy and said I had severe gastritis (inflammation of the stomach), laryngopharyngeal reflux (LPR) and non-acid reflux. You are probably thinking what I thought..."What the heck is non-acid reflux?" This doctor explained to me that I probably had bile refluxing from the intestines into the stomach and then into the esophagus.

Naturally my question was, “So what do we do about bile reflux?” And his response was...”Proton Pump Inhibitors and if that does not work, consider hiatal hernia surgery”. Unfortunately, the same old story.

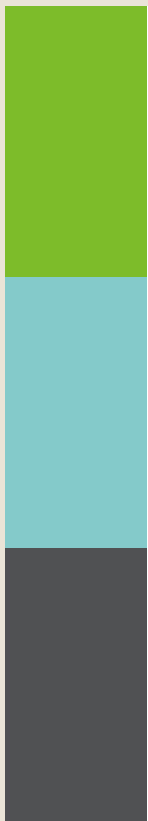
About 5 years ago I got to the point where I frequently had extreme stomach pain and difficulty swallowing. It was all I could do to get out of bed and make it through the day.

Several doctors were convinced I had cancer and after performing extensive tests that found nothing, they determined I had an auto-immune disease and needed to go on steroids and immune suppressing medications. In fact, by this time, I had several auto-immune diseases including eosinophilic esophagitis and Hashimoto’s Thyroiditis.



Several doctors were convinced that I had cancer, despite the lack of evidence from the extensive testing.

Mike Woodley, R.Ph., FAARM, FMNM



Chapter Three

Enlightened



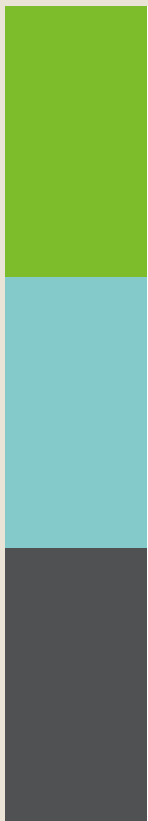
Enlightened

My frustration with a total inability of medicine to heal me led to a eureka moment.

At this point I decided it was time to take a different approach. After all, 15 years of medication and blindly following the conventional medical approach had not proven successful. I realized that the traditional treatments were not working. So, I declined my health care provider's recommended therapy and started seeing alternative health practitioners.

I saw one alternative healthcare practitioner for two years and gained valuable insight from him, but I was spending over \$500 a month on supplements in addition to his appointment fee, which was not covered by insurance. At times I felt they were just throwing supplements at me to see what might work. I also believed they were simply substituting herbal or vitamin products for prescription drugs in an effort to treat symptoms in a more natural manner. While I did show some improvement, there was still no insight as to a cure for the underlying problem.

Traditional medicine by itself was not working. Neither was alternative medicine. I had realized that if a pathway back to health was going to be found then I would be the one to find it for myself, based on my particular needs, my individual situation, my unique genetic make-up and my ability to understand what my body was trying desperately to tell me. What I needed was more education.



Chapter Four

Educated



Educated

I'd realized another way – now I needed knowledge to keep going on the path.

I initially studied chemistry in college with an interest in biochemistry before deciding in my final year of college to go to pharmacy school and become a pharmacist. So, with a strong medical background, I decided it was time to take matters into my own hands.

Not unlike many people, I started searching the internet and reading books. I read about things like candida overgrowth, leaky gut syndrome, and many others. My symptoms fit the description of many of these and I followed multiple diets and used recommended supplements in an effort to resolve them.

During this time of research, I discovered how suppressing stomach acid through medication creates bacterial imbalances in the gut, and how these imbalances in bacteria eventually lead to many health issues including candida overgrowth, leaky gut syndrome, and frequently auto-immune diseases. This is why these acid suppressing medications are only recommended for short term use. I also decided to test myself for food allergies by going on a food elimination diet. Through the food elimination diet, I discovered I had a gluten intolerance. I removed gluten from the diet and within weeks my reflux improved. Over the next year I was able to eliminate my reflux, the hiatal hernia went away and eventually, by taking a very systematic approach, I was able to reverse the auto-immune condition (which my doctors said could not be done). I have now been largely symptom free and off all medications for over 4 years.

Little did I know years ago that reflux is a symptom of an underlying issue. It is not normal and should have been a clue that something was not right. The heavy course of antibiotics after my ruptured appendix followed by acid suppressing medication permanently altered my normal gut bacteria leading to many more health issues years down the road.

If this is not surprising enough, when asked by my primary care physician why I was no longer taking my medication, I told him that after giving up gluten I no longer had reflux. Skeptical, he performed a blood test and when it did not show an allergic reaction to gluten, he insisted I go back on gluten to be healthy. He was unaware when I explained to him the allergy test he ordered was unreliable because there are multiple forms of allergies and this test was only testing for one type, not to mention the fact that I had been off gluten for almost a year at this point which would affect the results.

Additionally, when I had my next colonoscopy and endoscopy, the gastroenterologist did a biopsy of my intestines. When the results came back, the gastroenterologist response to me was, thank goodness you gave up gluten as the biopsy shows you have both genes for celiac disease. On another positive note, the Barret's esophagus is gone!



Vitopia wants to help you change your life for the better through education, training, and support as you address your health conditions. Our goal is to empower you with transformational knowledge to address both your current health issues, and to assist you and your health care providers in preventing or treating disease before it interferes with the best possible you!

READ MORE ABOUT US



Chapter Five

Empowered



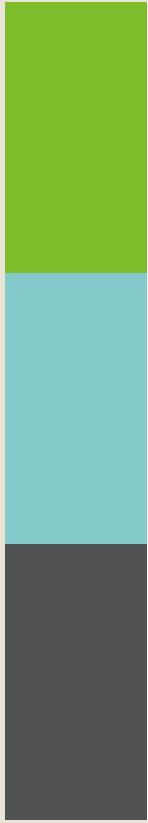
Empowered

My chronic conditions could be healed because I now knew the underlying causes.

At this point, I became inspired to learn as much as possible. As a pharmacist, I was trained in conventional medicine. However, as a patient I experienced many frustrations and saw many problems with the conventional medicine approach to disease. Likewise, I believed my experiences with the alternative medicine approach did not provide all the answers.

In searching hundreds of websites and reading many books written by different types of practitioners, I found a lot of great information but also a lot of unsubstantiated theories. Having a strong science background, I wanted to see sound scientific evidence for alternative recommendations and not just take information at face value.

As I sorted through and read hundreds of scientific articles, even from what appeared to be reputable practitioners, I found a great deal of conflicting information. I became increasingly frustrated with all this available information and questioned how to discern what information to believe.



Chapter Six

Functional Medicine



Functional Medicine

The pathway to health and vitality.

All of my reading and research led me to the Metabolic Medical Institute (affiliated with the University of South Florida School of Medicine). I selected this program because the focus was on identifying the cause of disease and correcting the cause instead of treating the symptoms. This resonated with what I believe, that true healing requires identifying the underlying problem and taking corrective action. Treating symptoms is not a cure whether it is done with prescription medications or alternative supplements. I also liked the fact that all their teaching was based on science and supported by clinical studies. So, after thorough investigation of this program, I enrolled and completed a two-year fellowship in Functional Medicine.

As I studied, talked with physicians in the program, completed the fellowship, and applied this information and approach to my personal life, I realized just how powerful this information is and that I must share this information with as many people as possible. I have personally experienced the power functional medicine has to transform one's health. Additionally, I have seen this illustrated through people I have met in the fellowship as well as people I have personally worked with since completing the training.

I have spent the past 40 years of my life studying science. I am both an advocate of conventional medicine and alternative medicine. I believe there is a time, a place, and a value for each. Without question doctors trained in conventional medicine are highly intelligent, knowledgeable, and motivated to improve the lives of their patients.



I believe that while their medical education offers great results for treating acute illness, it falls short when it comes to treating chronic diseases. To make matters worse, they are working in a flawed system, which allows insufficient time to understand and identify what is going on with an individual patient. Unfortunately, to a large extent, the way they must treat patients is dictated to them by insurers, government and regulatory agencies. I have experienced this myself in my pharmacy career and hear it regularly from my physician, nurse and pharmacist friends.

While I embrace both conventional and alternative treatments, I seek sound science and data to support any recommended therapy. I tend to question studies funded by those with a vested financial interest in the outcome of the study (whether this is a drug company or an individual practitioner selling their own product).

I believe in root-cause healing! We should first look at the physiological processes in the body and identify any potential malfunctions or imbalances. Whether these are caused by deficiencies, excesses, genetics, or other causes, simply masking them with drugs is not the answer. Taking the time to understand and correct them can result in the reversal of symptoms and disease states. I believe that symptoms are our body's way of telling us something is wrong. In my case, my GERD and multiple digestive symptoms were telling me I had imbalances in healthy gut bacteria and needed to avoid gluten. Once we identify these underlying causes of illness, we can then determine the best course of action to return balance. These approaches may include prescription medication, supplements, nutrition, and exercise.

I believe the body has an amazing ability to heal itself if we identify the underlying cause of illness and give the body what it needs and remove what it does not need. I believe that true health and healing requires balance in many areas of life including good nutrition, adequate exercise, healthy relationships, quality sleep, stress reduction and spirituality, just to name a few.



Chapter Seven

My Goal





My Goal

I want to give you the keys to a healthy and happy life!

It is my desire to help people by communicating the science of functional medicine and its power to heal and change lives. I am working to develop programs to identify health issues early so you do not have to go through the pain and frustration I experienced and to provide you with resources that make all of the complex science easy to understand and implement.

In developing these programs, I incorporate what I have learned over the years and I spend countless hours reviewing the latest research in an effort to provide you with scientifically based, reliable and unbiased information you can trust and apply in your personal journey to achieve optimal health.

Mike Woodley, R.Ph., BSP, FAARM



The Pathway to Vitality by Mike Woodley, R.Ph., FAARM, FMNM

Learn more about Mike, functional medicine, and product recommendations at [VitopiaHealth.com](https://www.vitopiahealth.com).

Once I became a patient myself, I started questioning some of what I had been trained to do as a pharmacist. What I discovered, and the changes I made, changed my life. Now I want to help others do the same.

Mike Woodley, R.Ph., FAARM, FMNM

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