

# Five Paths, One Goal

Understanding Functional, Naturopathic, Holistic,  
Integrative & Alternative Medicine

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A Patient's Guide to Root-Cause Healing

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Roswell, Georgia

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Five Paths, One Goal: Understanding Functional, Naturopathic, Holistic, Integrative & Alternative Medicine

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# Table of Contents

A Letter from Dr. Gail Ravello

Introduction: A New Era of Wellness

Chapter 1: The Roots of Natural Medicine

Chapter 2: Functional Medicine

Chapter 3: Naturopathic Medicine

Chapter 4: Holistic Medicine

Chapter 5: Integrative Medicine

Chapter 6: Alternative Medicine

Chapter 7: What They Share — Common Ground

Chapter 8: Key Differences at a Glance

Chapter 9: Which Approach Is Right for You?

Chapter 10: Conditions We Commonly Address

Chapter 11: What to Expect at Natural Medical Solutions

About Dr. Gail Ravello, PhD, IMD

Your Next Step

# A Letter from Dr. Gail Ravello

Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up this guide. If you are here, there is a good chance you or someone you love is looking for answers that conventional medicine alone has not provided. You may be tired of being told your lab work is “normal” when you clearly do not feel normal. You may be weary of prescriptions that only mask symptoms without explaining why they appeared in the first place. Or you may simply be ready to take a more thoughtful, personalized path to long-term health.

Whatever brought you here, I want you to know: you are in the right place.

At Natural Medical Solutions Wellness Center in Roswell, Georgia, we have spent years helping patients from across the Atlanta metro and beyond reclaim energy, balance, and vitality by looking beyond the symptoms to the underlying causes. The approaches we use — functional medicine, naturopathic medicine, holistic medicine, integrative medicine, and certain alternative therapies — each offer something unique. Used together thoughtfully, they form a comprehensive, patient-centered path to healing.

But the terminology can be confusing. What is the difference between functional and integrative? Is naturopathic medicine the same as holistic? Where does alternative medicine fit in? These are questions I hear almost every week, and they deserve clear answers.

This e-book is my attempt to provide those answers in plain language. By the end, I hope you have a much clearer understanding of what these approaches share, how they differ, and which elements might best support your personal health journey.

Most importantly, I hope you come away with renewed hope. Your body has extraordinary capacity for healing when it is given the right inputs and the right environment. It is my honor to walk that path with every patient I see.

Warmly,

**Dr. Gail Ravello, PhD, IMD**

Founder, Natural Medical Solutions Wellness Center

# A New Era of Wellness

Over the past several decades, something remarkable has happened in American healthcare. Patients have begun asking deeper questions. They are no longer satisfied with a ten-minute appointment and a prescription pad. They want to understand their bodies. They want to know why they feel the way they feel. And they want solutions that support long-term vitality rather than short-term symptom relief.

This shift has fueled enormous growth in natural, integrative, and root-cause approaches to medicine. Today, nearly forty percent of American adults use some form of complementary or alternative medicine, and that number continues to climb. Patients are voting with their feet, their dollars, and their loyalty for care models that treat them as whole people, not collections of symptoms.

Yet with this growth has come confusion. The same practice may describe itself as functional one day, integrative the next, and holistic the day after that. Marketing language gets muddled. Important distinctions blur. And patients are left wondering which approach — or which combination — is truly right for them.

This e-book is designed to cut through that confusion. In the chapters that follow, we will look at each of the five main branches of modern natural medicine in turn: functional, naturopathic, holistic, integrative, and alternative. We will examine what makes each approach distinctive, what philosophy animates its practitioners, and what patients can typically expect.

Then we will bring it all together. We will identify the common ground shared by all five approaches, the key differences that set them apart, and practical guidance for choosing the right path forward. Finally, we will show you what care looks like at Natural Medical Solutions Wellness Center and how we blend the best of these traditions to serve our patients.

Whether you are a seasoned natural-medicine patient or exploring these ideas for the very first time, we hope you finish this book feeling more informed, more empowered, and more hopeful about your health.

# The Roots of Natural Medicine

Long before modern pharmaceuticals, humans healed with food, plants, movement, breath, touch, and community. Every traditional culture — from ancient Ayurvedic practitioners in India, to the physicians of classical China, to the herbal traditions of indigenous Americans and Europeans — developed rich systems of healing rooted in careful observation of the natural world.

These systems shared striking common assumptions. They viewed the body as a self-regulating organism with an inborn capacity to heal. They emphasized balance, not just among organs but between mind, body, and environment. They saw illness as a signal from the body, not merely a nuisance to be silenced. And they treated the whole person, not a disease label.

Modern natural medicine stands on these ancient foundations while integrating everything science has learned about biochemistry, genetics, the microbiome, and cellular function. The result is a powerful hybrid: time-honored wisdom refined by modern research.

In the twentieth century, conventional medicine achieved extraordinary successes — particularly in acute care, surgery, infectious disease, and emergency medicine. There is no question that these advances have saved countless lives. But conventional medicine has struggled with the chronic conditions that dominate today's health landscape: autoimmune disease, hormone imbalance, gut dysfunction, chronic fatigue, metabolic disease, and mental health issues.

These are complex, multi-factor, lifestyle-influenced conditions. They rarely have a single cause, and they rarely respond to a single-drug solution. This is where natural, root-cause approaches have quietly excelled — and where their popularity has grown.

The five paths we will explore in this book all grew from this same soil. They differ in emphasis, training, and terminology, but they share a common commitment: to help patients heal at the root.

# Functional Medicine

*“Ask why, not just what.”*

Functional medicine is a systems-biology approach that focuses on identifying and addressing the root causes of disease. Rather than asking *what* disease a patient has, functional medicine asks *why* the patient’s body is expressing that condition in the first place.

Every symptom — whether fatigue, bloating, migraine, weight gain, or anxiety — is viewed as a downstream signal of upstream dysfunction. Functional medicine practitioners work backward along the chain of cause and effect, asking questions like: Is there inflammation? Is the gut lining intact? Are detoxification pathways working? Are hormones balanced? Are essential nutrients present? Are there hidden infections, toxins, or stress patterns driving dysfunction?

## What Makes It Distinctive

Functional medicine is characterized by heavy reliance on advanced laboratory testing. Practitioners routinely use specialized panels that examine hormone metabolism, comprehensive stool analysis, organic acid testing, micronutrient status, food sensitivities, heavy metal exposure, and genetic SNPs. The goal is to build a detailed biochemical map of the individual patient.

The clinical approach is also distinctive. Initial visits are long — typically 60 to 90 minutes — and include a detailed timeline of the patient’s life, health history, environment, and triggers. Treatment plans are highly personalized and usually combine targeted nutrition, supplements, lifestyle changes, stress management, and sometimes medications when appropriate.

Functional medicine was formalized in the 1990s by Dr. Jeffrey Bland and popularized through the Institute for Functional Medicine. Today it represents one of the fastest-growing segments of medicine and is practiced by MDs, DOs, naturopaths, chiropractors, nurse practitioners, and others who pursue additional training in the method.

## Best For

Functional medicine is particularly powerful for complex chronic conditions where conventional workups have come back “normal” but the patient still does not feel well. It excels at hormone imbalance, thyroid dysfunction, gut issues, autoimmune disease, chronic fatigue, metabolic syndrome, and unexplained inflammation.

# Naturopathic Medicine

*“First, do no harm. Treat the whole person. Identify and treat the cause.”*

Naturopathic medicine is a distinct medical tradition with deep historical roots in European nature cure, American eclectic medicine, and traditional healing. Naturopathic doctors (NDs) are trained in four-year, accredited naturopathic medical schools that combine conventional biomedical science with therapies that emphasize the body’s innate capacity to heal.

Six core principles guide naturopathic practice. Practitioners first do no harm, choosing the least invasive and most natural interventions possible. They trust the healing power of nature, recognizing that the body has an ordered and intelligent drive toward health. They identify and treat the causes of illness, not just the symptoms. They treat the whole person, not an isolated body part. They act as teachers, empowering patients with knowledge. And they emphasize prevention as the best medicine.

## What Makes It Distinctive

Naturopathic medicine draws on a broad toolkit that includes clinical nutrition, botanical medicine (herbs), homeopathy, hydrotherapy, physical medicine, lifestyle counseling, mind-body medicine, and in some jurisdictions, minor surgery and pharmaceutical prescribing. Naturopathic doctors are trained to integrate these therapies thoughtfully based on the needs of each patient.

Botanical medicine is a particularly strong area of naturopathic expertise. NDs study the therapeutic use of herbs in depth, including how plant compounds interact with conventional medications and how to select the right herb at the right dose for the right patient.

In the United States, licensure of naturopathic doctors varies by state. In some states, NDs practice as primary care physicians; in others, their scope is more limited. Dr. Gail Ravello’s credentials reflect advanced naturopathic and integrative medical training that brings this tradition directly to patients in Georgia.

## Best For

Naturopathic medicine shines for patients who prefer natural-first therapies, want skilled herbal and nutritional guidance, and value a strong emphasis on prevention and lifestyle. It is especially effective for digestive complaints, women’s health, stress-related conditions, chronic inflammation, and general wellness optimization.

# Holistic Medicine

*“The body, mind, emotions, and spirit are one interconnected whole.”*

Holistic medicine is less a specific discipline than a philosophical stance. It holds that a human being is an indivisible whole — body, mind, emotions, and spirit — and that true health can only be understood by honoring all of these dimensions.

A holistic practitioner does not dismiss the physical body or its biochemistry. But they also pay careful attention to emotional patterns, relationships, meaning, purpose, grief, stress, spiritual life, and environment. They recognize that a heart-broken patient may develop physical heart disease, that chronic fear shapes the immune system, that unresolved trauma can manifest as gut dysfunction, and that meaning and connection are as essential to health as nutrition and exercise.

## What Makes It Distinctive

Holistic medicine is defined by its emphasis on the whole person. Practitioners often spend significant time understanding a patient’s life story, emotional landscape, and sources of stress or fulfillment. Treatment may include conventional therapies, natural therapies, mind-body practices, counseling, energy medicine, spiritual support, or creative and expressive practices — whatever best serves the whole person.

Holistic medicine is practiced by a wide range of professionals including MDs, DOs, NDs, chiropractors, acupuncturists, nurses, psychologists, and bodyworkers. What unifies them is not a specific set of tools but a shared commitment to seeing and serving the whole person.

## Best For

Holistic medicine is ideal for patients who recognize that their symptoms have emotional, spiritual, or relational dimensions — or who simply want a care experience that honors the fullness of who they are. It is particularly helpful for stress-related conditions, burnout, grief, trauma, mind-body disorders, and chronic illness that carries an emotional burden.

# Integrative Medicine

*“The best of conventional and complementary, working together.”*

Integrative medicine is the intentional blending of conventional medicine with evidence-informed complementary therapies to provide comprehensive patient care. Integrative practitioners do not reject pharmaceuticals, surgery, or modern diagnostics — they embrace these when appropriate. But they also draw thoughtfully from acupuncture, nutrition, herbal medicine, mind-body practices, manual therapies, and lifestyle interventions.

The goal is not either-or but both-and. An integrative oncologist may support a patient through chemotherapy with acupuncture for nausea, herbs for fatigue, mind-body practices for anxiety, and nutritional strategies to support recovery. An integrative cardiologist may prescribe statins and yoga. An integrative primary care physician may use antibiotics for strep and probiotics for gut recovery afterward.

## What Makes It Distinctive

Integrative medicine is distinguished by its evidence-informed philosophy and its embrace of both medical worlds. Integrative practitioners stay current on research in both conventional and complementary fields and choose therapies based on what best serves the patient.

Many major academic medical centers now have integrative medicine programs, including the Cleveland Clinic, Duke, Mayo, and the University of Arizona. This academic legitimacy has helped bring previously marginalized therapies into mainstream healthcare.

## Best For

Integrative medicine is well-suited for patients who want to preserve the benefits of conventional care while adding natural and complementary supports. It is particularly valuable for complex, overlapping conditions that require coordination among multiple specialties, for cancer support, cardiovascular disease, chronic pain, and mental health.

# Alternative Medicine

*“Therapies that fall outside the conventional mainstream.”*

“Alternative medicine” is an umbrella term for healing practices that fall outside the conventional medical mainstream. The category is enormous and includes ancient systems like Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda, body-based therapies like chiropractic and massage, energy-based therapies like Reiki, mind-body practices like yoga and meditation, and many more.

The terminology has evolved. Today, most practitioners prefer the terms “complementary” (used alongside conventional care) or “integrative” (intentionally blended with conventional care) rather than “alternative” (used instead of conventional care). However, “alternative medicine” remains a widely searched and widely understood term, particularly among patients exploring non-pharmaceutical options for the first time.

## What Makes It Distinctive

What unites therapies under the alternative medicine banner is primarily their position relative to conventional medicine. Some alternative therapies are ancient, refined over thousands of years and backed by growing research evidence. Others are modern innovations with varying levels of support. Because the category is so broad, patients exploring alternative medicine benefit from working with a knowledgeable practitioner who can help them distinguish well-supported therapies from those that are less reliable.

At Natural Medical Solutions, we carefully evaluate complementary and alternative therapies for safety, evidence, and fit for each patient. We recommend what we believe will help and set aside what will not.

## Best For

Alternative therapies are best approached as part of a broader integrative plan, with guidance from a qualified practitioner who understands both conventional and complementary options. Selected wisely, alternative and complementary therapies can bring profound relief for pain, stress, musculoskeletal issues, and many chronic conditions.

# What They Share — Common Ground

Though they speak slightly different languages, all five approaches — functional, naturopathic, holistic, integrative, and thoughtful alternative medicine — share a common core. Understanding this common ground is the single most important step in choosing and combining them wisely. Here are the seven threads that unite them:

## 1. Focus on Root Causes

All five approaches look upstream of symptoms. A headache is not just a headache; it is a signal. Fatigue is not just a lifestyle issue; it is a message from the body. Practitioners in every one of these traditions work to identify and address the why behind what a patient is experiencing.

## 2. The Whole Person

Every one of these approaches treats the patient as a whole person, not a collection of organs. Each recognizes that the mind, body, emotions, environment, relationships, and spirit are interconnected and that healing requires honoring all of them.

## 3. Therapeutic Partnership

Long appointments, deep listening, and genuine partnership define the patient experience across all five approaches. Patients are collaborators, not passive recipients. This is a sharp contrast to the rushed visits that have become common in much of conventional care.

## 4. Nutrition, Lifestyle, and Environment

Every one of these traditions treats nutrition, sleep, movement, stress, and environment as foundational to health. Medications and supplements may have important roles, but they are layered on top of lifestyle fundamentals, not used to bypass them.

## 5. Prevention and Optimization

These approaches do not wait for disease before acting. They emphasize the promotion of optimal function and the prevention of illness — not merely the treatment of established disease.

## 6. The Body's Innate Healing Capacity

All five approaches share a fundamental trust in the body's capacity to heal when given the right inputs and the right environment. The practitioner's role is to remove obstacles, supply missing nutrients, and support the body's own intelligence.

## **7. Evidence-Informed, Individualized Care**

Modern practitioners in all five traditions pay close attention to scientific evidence while also respecting the uniqueness of each patient. Two patients with the same diagnosis may receive very different care plans, because they are two different people.

## Key Differences at a Glance

If the five approaches share so much, what really sets them apart? In a word: **emphasis**. Each tradition prioritizes different tools, philosophies, and angles of entry into the healing process. The table below summarizes the most important distinctions.

Approach	Core Emphasis	Distinctive Tools	Patient Fit
<b>Functional</b>	Root-cause, systems biology	Advanced lab testing, personalized protocols	Complex chronic conditions
<b>Naturopathic</b>	Nature's healing power	Botanical medicine, hydrotherapy, nutrition	Natural-first patients, prevention
<b>Holistic</b>	Whole person (body, mind, spirit)	Mind-body, story, relationships, meaning	Emotional, spiritual, trauma-linked conditions
<b>Integrative</b>	Best of both worlds	Conventional + complementary coordination	Patients needing both tracks together
<b>Alternative</b>	Non-conventional therapies	Acupuncture, TCM, Ayurveda, energy work	Those seeking non-pharmaceutical options

It is important to recognize that a single practice may — and often does — draw on several of these approaches simultaneously. At Natural Medical Solutions, for example, we combine functional medicine's systems-biology rigor, naturopathic medicine's gentle, natural-first toolkit, and holistic medicine's whole-person perspective. The labels matter less than the quality of the care and the fit with the patient.

# Which Approach Is Right for You?

With so much overlap, the honest answer for most patients is that you do not have to choose just one. The best practitioners blend approaches thoughtfully based on what each patient needs. That said, these reflective questions can help you understand which emphasis may resonate most.

## Consider Functional Medicine If...

- You have complex, chronic symptoms and want detailed lab testing to find the root cause.
- Your conventional workup has been “normal” but you still feel unwell.
- You value systems-level thinking and data-driven, personalized protocols.
- You are dealing with hormones, gut issues, autoimmunity, or metabolic dysfunction.

## Consider Naturopathic Medicine If...

- You prefer natural-first therapies: herbs, nutrition, lifestyle, and gentler interventions.
- You want a practitioner deeply trained in botanical and nutritional medicine.
- You are focused on prevention and daily optimization of health.
- You appreciate an empowered, educational relationship with your provider.

## Consider Holistic Medicine If...

- Your symptoms have clear emotional, spiritual, or relational dimensions.
- You sense that stress, trauma, or life meaning is at the heart of your health issue.
- You want a care experience that honors all aspects of who you are.
- You are navigating burnout, grief, major life transitions, or mind-body disorders.

## Consider Integrative Medicine If...

- You value conventional tools but want natural options added in thoughtfully.
- You are managing a complex condition that benefits from multi-track care (e.g., cancer, heart disease).
- You want a practitioner comfortable coordinating with your conventional specialists.

- You prefer an evidence-informed, both-and philosophy.

## **Consider Alternative Therapies If...**

- You are looking for non-pharmaceutical options such as acupuncture, TCM, or Ayurveda.
- You want to explore therapies outside the conventional toolbox for pain, stress, or wellness.
- You want a guide who can separate well-supported complementary therapies from less reliable ones.

## **The Blended Approach Most Patients Need**

In our experience at Natural Medical Solutions, most patients benefit from a thoughtful blend of these traditions rather than a single label. Your care might include functional-medicine lab testing, naturopathic botanical and nutritional protocols, holistic attention to stress and meaning, integrative coordination with your conventional doctors, and selected complementary therapies. The label matters less than the fit.

## Conditions We Commonly Address

Natural medicine approaches can be helpful for a wide range of conditions. Below is a summary of areas where we see particular success at Natural Medical Solutions. If your concern does not appear here, please do not assume we cannot help — call our office to discuss.

### **Hormonal & Thyroid Health**

Thyroid dysfunction, Hashimoto's, adrenal fatigue, perimenopause and menopause, andropause and low testosterone, PCOS, PMS, hormonal acne, infertility support.

### **Digestive & Gut Health**

IBS, SIBO, leaky gut, reflux and GERD, chronic bloating, food sensitivities, microbiome imbalances, chronic constipation or diarrhea.

### **Autoimmune & Inflammatory**

Hashimoto's, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, psoriasis, eczema, fibromyalgia, chronic inflammation, joint pain.

### **Energy, Fatigue & Cognition**

Chronic fatigue, brain fog, burnout, adrenal burnout, mitochondrial dysfunction, sleep issues, cognitive decline, post-viral fatigue.

### **Metabolic Health**

Insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, weight loss resistance, prediabetes, high cholesterol, cardiovascular risk reduction.

### **Mood, Stress & Nervous System**

Anxiety, mood imbalances, chronic stress, nervous-system dysregulation, post-traumatic stress patterns, sleep disturbance.

### **Women's & Men's Health**

Fertility support, postpartum recovery, midlife transitions, testosterone optimization, prostate health, sexual health.

### **Wellness & Optimization**

Preventive care, healthy aging, athletic performance, cognitive performance, detoxification support, longevity strategies.

# What to Expect at Natural Medical Solutions

If you decide to begin your journey with us, here is what you can expect. Our care process is designed to be thorough, personal, and action-oriented.

## 1. Initial Consultation

Your first visit is a comprehensive 60 to 90 minute consultation with Dr. Ravello. We will review your complete health history, the timeline of your symptoms, your lifestyle, stressors, and goals. This is a conversation — not an interrogation — and our goal is to understand the whole of you.

## 2. Personalized Testing

Based on what we learn, we may recommend advanced functional laboratory testing — such as comprehensive hormone panels, gut and microbiome analysis, food sensitivity testing, nutrient status, organic acids, or specialty panels tailored to your situation. We order only what will meaningfully inform your care.

## 3. Your Personalized Plan

After reviewing your results, we create a targeted plan that may include nutrition, supplements, botanical medicine, lifestyle strategies, stress support, and coordination with any other providers you work with. Every recommendation is explained clearly so you understand the why.

## 4. Follow-Up and Refinement

Healing is rarely linear, and your body's needs will evolve. We schedule appropriate follow-up visits to monitor progress, adjust protocols, retest when helpful, and continue moving you toward your goals.

## 5. Partnership for the Long Run

Many of our patients stay connected with us long after their initial concern has resolved, using our practice for ongoing wellness support and prevention. Our door remains open whenever you need us.

# About Dr. Gail Ravello, PhD, IMD

Dr. Gail Ravello is the founder of Natural Medical Solutions Wellness Center and a dedicated practitioner of functional, naturopathic, and integrative medicine. With advanced training culminating in both a PhD and an Integrative Medicine Doctorate (IMD), Dr. Ravello combines rigorous scientific expertise with a deep commitment to patient-centered, natural care.

Her practice is built on the conviction that patients deserve more than rushed appointments and symptom suppression. Every patient who walks through the door at Natural Medical Solutions is met with the time, attention, and personalized investigation that true healing requires.

Dr. Ravello has helped patients from across the greater Atlanta metropolitan area and the southeastern United States address complex, chronic, and often previously-unexplained health concerns. Her approach honors the best of modern science while drawing on time-tested natural traditions — exactly the kind of integration this e-book has described.

Beyond clinical care, Dr. Ravello is a passionate educator. She believes that informed patients heal better, and she makes teaching a central part of every appointment.

# Your Next Step

Thank you for reading. We hope this guide has brought clarity to a sometimes confusing landscape and left you with a stronger sense of the possibilities available to you. Natural medicine is not magic — but it is often the missing piece for patients whose conventional care has not yet delivered the answers or relief they need.

If you are ready to explore what root-cause, personalized care could mean for your health, we invite you to reach out. The first conversation is always the hardest step — and it is also where healing begins.

## **Natural Medical Solutions Wellness Center**

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**To schedule your initial consultation**, please call our office at **(770) 674-6311** or visit **[www.natmedsol.com](http://www.natmedsol.com)**. In-person appointments are available at our Roswell office, and telehealth consultations are available throughout Georgia and the surrounding region.

*Your body has extraordinary capacity for healing when given the right support. We would be honored to walk that path with you.*