

DNA testing: a proactive and preventative approach to getting

By Sandie Fredriksson

Sandie Fredriksson helps women 40+ feel great, lose weight and take charge of how they will age. She uses a combination of bespoke nutrition and lifestyle coaching, supplements and genetic testing.

A simple cheek swab is all it takes to uncover your genetic health blueprint, but does that mean you should do it? Sandie Fredriksson helps you decide.



One day, out of the blue, your washing machine packs up. It seemed fine before, aside from the odd whirring noise that a quick bump of your hip could reliably fix. But now it's stopped working altogether, and the five-year warranty has just expired. Typical! Off you go to dig out the operating manual, hoping it will provide clues on how to fix it.

Unlike our washing machines, our bodies didn't come with a warranty, though thankfully, most of us manage to make it through our early years reasonably unscathed. But what you may not realise is that you were born with your very own operating manual - your DNA - and thanks to researchers cracking the human genome, you are now able to access it.

As we move through our forties, our bodies can start to behave in new and unpredictable ways. Perhaps you're struggling to stay up past 10pm, and even when you do manage to nail eight hours sleep, you still wake up feeling utterly exhausted. Or have you ever forgotten why you walked into the kitchen, even though you know it was for something important? New food-sensitivities, amped-up emotions, a thickening waistline; there are so many ways it can feel like your body is no longer your own.

You realise that the basic maintenance job you've been doing for the last four decades just isn't going to cut it. It's time for some proactive planning and perhaps a deeper understanding of the genetic hand you've been dealt with.

Confused and Frustrated

Which supplements should I take? Should I stop eating red meat? What about coffee, dairy and gluten - could these be a problem? While it's easy enough to source generic health advice from books or a bio-hacking account on Instagram, it can be hard to know the real impact any of these changes will have on your unique body. Just because your friend is feeling great on her keto diet and bullet-proof coffee doesn't mean it's right for your biological makeup. Not to mention how incredibly expensive and time-consuming it is to treat your body like some kind of laboratory experiment.

What if knowing that both your mum's parents had heart disease is forming the entire basis for your assumed destiny? Or you have gaps in your family's health history, as your parents lost touch with their ancestors in a faraway country long ago?

Trying to come up with a healthy-ageing action plan without answers to these questions can leave us feeling helpless, confused and frustrated.

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Getting personal

The older we get, the more valuable it is to understand the link between our genes and our likelihood of developing health problems. Identifying specific diet, lifestyle and supplement protocols that match your genetic blueprint can go a long way to removing some of the guesswork and optimising your outcomes.

My own genetic health report provided several “Aha!” moments. One of the standout results involved the process of DNA repair, with particular emphasis on the COMT gene, where I display the ‘slow’ AA variation. It prompted a mixed reaction presenting some challenges and one silver lining; let me explain.

This ‘slow’ COMT variation limits the body's ability to remove adrenaline and impairs HPA axis function (how we de-stress). Put simply, stress for me feels stronger, lasts longer, and does more damage. Knowing this has encouraged me to make my daily meditation habit non-negotiable and place some of the more triggering relationships in my life on the back burner. I've also added two stress-busting ‘magnesium + 5HTP’ capsules into my bedtime routine.

Oh, and I've finally ended my relationship with adrenaline-elevating coffee. It turns out I am genetically as bad as one can be at metabolising caffeine anyway, having inherited not one but two variants on my CYP1A2 gene - one from each of my parents.

As a 'slow' COMT, my body is also not great at getting rid of harmful oestrogen metabolites associated with an increased risk of breast cancer. I already include cancer-protective cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and cabbage in my diet since my breast cancer diagnosis in 2014. But now, armed with this genetic piece of my health puzzle, I've added an extra buffer of powerful broccoli sprout powder to my daily supplements.

Many of the changes I made have yielded immediate and noticeable results. Whereas some, such as a daily DNA-protective supplement, will provide a more invisible, slow-burn advantage.

So what about that silver lining? This 'slow' COMT variation also comes with 'superior executive functioning' such as logical thinking, efficient problem-solving, complex thought coordination and an ability to map out consequences. I'll take that!

To know or not to know?

DNA testing is an exciting new tool but does not appeal to everyone. I tend to get one of two responses when I discuss it with clients. For the most part, it's "Oh how fascinating - I would love to do that!" but there are some that understandably say, "I'd rather not know." It's a very personal choice. Finding out you are genetically at increased risk of type 2 diabetes is a considerable leap from discovering you are lactose intolerant.

It's also worth mentioning that these tests are notoriously difficult to interpret, which is why I discourage the DIY varieties. Having a qualified practitioner talk you through your results isn't just about deciphering them accurately but also to provide meaningful guidance on what to do next.

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I love the axiom 'genetics loads the gun, but lifestyle pulls the trigger.' This is the fascinating field of epigenetics - how we can turn the helpful genes on and switch the unhelpful genes off. Knowing you can take back control and responsibility for your health and wellbeing should feel incredibly empowering. What we eat, how we move our bodies, the hours we sleep, the toxins we are exposed to - even our thought patterns and emotional experiences; they all play a part. This is good news! It means how you age isn't down to just genes or luck; it's up to you. Every new day is a fresh opportunity to prevent and reduce your risk of illness or disease.

We now understand that our genes are not our destiny, but they do hold valuable clues that can help us. If you're already doing all the right things, but it still feels like you are battling your own body, then lifting the lid on your genetic blueprint might be exactly what you need to improve your outcomes.

How does it work?

We will send a DNA test kit to your home (a simple one-minute cheek swab), which you then post off in the packaging provided. Once your report is ready in 3-4 weeks, we will book you in for a one-hour consultation to discuss your results and provide a personalised action plan. Your DNA never changes, so you will only ever need to do this once.

Cost: £349, including a one-hour video call. To find out more, contact me on Instagram @thehealthyhabitscoach or at sandiefredriksson.com

A 10% discount offered to FRANK readers until 30th July 2021



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