FREE GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

A PLAIN-LANGUAGE FIELD GUIDE

What test do I actually need?

Stop guessing. Start with the right test, and a clear map of your biology.

Blood
What is happening today?

Diagnostic
Do I have this?

Genetic
What am I predisposed to?

Epigenetic
Is my lifestyle changing my genes?

A field guide to genetic, blood, epigenetic, and diagnostic testing, written for the person doing the asking, not the lab.

By Dr. Erika Gray, PharmD · GeneStyle co-founder and Chief Medical Officer

17 pages · Est. 12 min read

MEET YOUR GUIDE

Hi, I'm Dr. Erika Gray.



PHARMD · FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE TRAINED

CO-FOUNDER & CMO, GENESTYLE

I'm a licensed pharmacist with functional medicine training and years inside hospital pharmacy, which is to say, I've watched a lot of smart, motivated people walk out of appointments with answers to questions they weren't actually asking.

I co-founded GeneStyle to fix that. Genetic and epigenetic testing finally let us understand how a body is wired and how it's responding, not just what's wrong with it. My job is to translate that science into something you can actually use on a Tuesday.

> **"This guide is written the way I talk. No jargon, no pressure, just the information you actually need to choose well."**

WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

The problem nobody talks about.

Most people approach health testing the same way. They feel off, get bloodwork, wait for results, and either get answers or they don't. What almost nobody realizes is that there are **four fundamentally different categories of health testing**, each designed to answer a completely different question.

> **Choosing the wrong test doesn't mean you get bad information. It means you get answers to questions you weren't asking.**

Bloodwork

won't tell you why your body responds poorly to stress.

A genetic test

won't tell you what your cholesterol is today.

TAKEAWAY

You don't need all four tests. You need to understand what each one does, so you can make an informed choice about where to start.

A note on scope

This guide focuses on proactive lifestyle testing, the kind you choose before anything is wrong. It does not cover:

- Cancer or hereditary mutation testing (BRCA, CFTR)
- Prenatal or carrier screening
- Newborn screening
- Ancestry or genealogy testing

If any of those areas apply to you, a genetic counselor is your right next step, and we're happy to point you to one.

THE FOUR TESTS

Four tests. Four questions.

Each test is built to answer a specific question. Get the question right and the test almost picks itself.

Blood Tests

A blood test measures what is currently circulating in your body: nutrient levels, hormones, inflammatory markers, cholesterol, blood sugar. Think of it as a snapshot at a single moment in time. Results can shift based on what you ate last week, how you slept, or how stressed you've been. Widely available, mostly insurance-covered, and what most clinicians reach for first.

Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic tests are ordered when there is a reason to investigate a specific condition. Imaging, biopsies, specialized panels and ECGs confirm or rule out a diagnosis. They are reactive by nature: something prompts the investigation, and the test provides a clinical answer. These always involve a healthcare provider.

Lifestyle Genetic Tests

Genetic tests examine your DNA, the fixed biological instructions you were born with. Unlike bloodwork, your genetic results never change. They reveal predispositions: how your body is wired to process nutrients, respond to stress, metabolize substances. Lifestyle genetic tests are distinct from clinical ones; they're designed to inform proactive wellness, not to diagnose disease.

Epigenetic Tests

Where genetic tests show your fixed predispositions, epigenetic tests show how your current lifestyle is influencing how those genes are actually expressing right now. Think of your DNA as a piano: genetics tells you which keys exist; epigenetics shows which ones are being played.

AT-A-GLANCE COMPARISON

The four tests, side by side.

Blood

SHOWS	Current state of your body
CHANGES?	Yes, reflects recent habits
DOCTOR?	Usually
COST	$50–$300+
ASKS	What is happening today?

Diagnostic

SHOWS	Confirms or rules out a condition
CHANGES?	Depends on condition
DOCTOR?	Yes
COST	$100–$1,000+
ASKS	Do I have this?

Genetic

SHOWS	Permanent biological predispositions
CHANGES?	No, your DNA is fixed
DOCTOR?	Not always (DTC)
COST	$99–$400+
ASKS	What am I predisposed to?

Epigenetic

SHOWS	How lifestyle is influencing gene expression
CHANGES?	Yes, responds to behavior
DOCTOR?	Emerging DTC
COST	$200–$500+
ASKS	Is my lifestyle changing my genes?

FIND YOUR STARTING POINT

What are you actually trying to find out?

The most common mistake is starting with the test instead of the question. Start with the question; the test almost picks itself.

YOUR SITUATION	BEST STARTING POINT	WHY
I feel off but don't know why	Blood test first	Reveals current deficiencies, inflammation or hormonal imbalances behind symptoms
My doctor wants to investigate a specific symptom	Diagnostic test	Confirms or rules out a specific condition with clinical precision
I want to get ahead of my health before problems start	Lifestyle genetic test	Shows permanent predispositions so you can intervene proactively
I have bloodwork but want to know why	Genetic + blood	Genetics explains the biological reason behind your bloodwork patterns
I want to know if my daily habits are working biologically	Epigenetic test	Shows whether lifestyle choices are positively influencing gene expression

TAKEAWAY

Starting points, not rigid rules. Many people benefit from combining tests; page 12 covers how all four work together.

AN HONEST RECOMMENDATION

If you're generally healthy and curious, start here.

If you're generally healthy, curious, and want to get ahead of your biology before problems appear, lifestyle genetic testing is often the highest-leverage starting point.

> **Your genes do not change, which means you only need to test once. Everything you learn becomes a permanent lens through which all your other health decisions become more informed.**

Especially true if…

You've done bloodwork repeatedly and felt like you weren't getting the full story. Genetics often explains the patterns your bloodwork keeps showing.

WHY IT MATTERS

One test. A permanent map. Every health decision after it gets sharper because you finally know what you're working with.

HONEST TRADE-OFFS

The strengths and limits of each test.

An honest breakdown of what each type genuinely does well, and where it stops.

TEST	STRENGTHS	LIMITS	COMMON MYTH
Blood	Fast, widely available, immediately actionable	A snapshot. Shifts with diet, sleep, stress	“Mine was normal so I must be healthy”
Diagnostic	Gold standard for confirming conditions	Reactive. Usually ordered after symptoms	“A negative means nothing is wrong”
Lifestyle Genetic	Permanent insight. Test once. Proactive	Not diagnostic. Shows predisposition, not certainty	“My genes determine my future”
Epigenetic	Real-time view of lifestyle’s effect on genes	Emerging science, fewer standardized panels	“Epigenetics overrides any genetic risk”

TAKEAWAY

No single test tells the whole story. Knowing the limits is what turns data into a real decision.

LIFESTYLE GENETICS

Why lifestyle genetics is the missing piece.

When most people hear “genetic testing,” they think of two things: ancestry, or disease risk. Both are valid categories. But neither is what we’re talking about here.

> **Lifestyle genetic testing is a third category most people have never heard of, and it’s the one with the most direct application to how you live every single day.**

What lifestyle genetics actually tests

Rather than looking for mutations associated with specific diseases, lifestyle genetics examines how your body is fundamentally wired to function. This includes:

- How efficiently you absorb and process nutrients (vitamin D, folate, omega-3s, B12)
- How your nervous system responds to and recovers from stress
- How your brain produces and clears dopamine and serotonin
- How your muscles respond to exercise and physical load
- How quickly you process inflammatory compounds and environmental inputs

IN ONE LINE

It tells you how your body is wired, and therefore where your highest-leverage intervention points are.

ON GENETIC TEST ACCURACY

The difference that changes everything.

Lifestyle genetic tests use SNP (single nucleotide polymorphism) genotyping. They look at specific, well-researched points in your genome associated with particular traits and predispositions. This is different from whole-genome sequencing and from clinical-grade testing for rare mutations.

CLINICAL GENETIC TESTING	LIFESTYLE GENETIC TESTING
Looks for mutations linked to disease	Looks at how your body is wired to function
Ordered by a physician for clinical reasons	Self-initiated for proactive wellness
Do I have a dangerous variant?	How can I optimize how I function?

EPIGENETICS

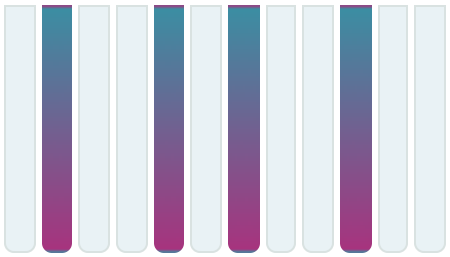
Epigenetics: proof that what you do daily matters.

If there is one concept in modern biology that changes how people think about their health, it's epigenetics. Yet most people have never heard of it outside of a headline.

Your genes are fixed. How they express is not.

Your DNA sequence, the code you were born with, does not change over your lifetime. What does change is which genes are active, how loudly they're expressed, and how they're being read by your body right now.

This is epigenetics. The prefix *epi-* means "above" or "on top of." Epigenetics is what sits on top of your DNA and controls its behavior. And crucially, this layer is directly influenced by your daily choices.



THE PIANO ANALOGY

Your DNA is a piano. Every key (gene) exists, but not all of them are being played. Epigenetics is the sheet music your lifestyle is writing right now. Chronic stress, poor sleep, a nutrient-deficient diet play certain keys. Movement, quality sleep, targeted nutrition play different ones. You don't change the piano, but you absolutely influence the music.

DAILY CHOICES, MEASURABLE

What epigenetics means for your daily choices.

This is the scientific answer to the pessimistic question people ask after getting genetic results: if it's already in my genes, why does any of my behavior matter?

> **It matters because your behavior is in constant conversation with your genome. Every lifestyle choice you make is sending instructions to your DNA about how to express itself. Not metaphorically; biochemically.**

Sleep

Sleep quality directly influences expression of genes involved in cellular repair and immune function

Stress

Chronic psychological stress alters epigenetic markers tied to inflammation and cognition

Nutrients

Specific nutrients (folate, B vitamins, omega-3s) are directly involved in the chemistry that regulates gene expression

Exercise

Physical exercise is one of the most powerful epigenetic interventions known, particularly for brain genes like BDNF

TAKEAWAY

Your genome listens. The choices you made this week are already changing how it speaks back to you.

TOGETHER

How all four tests work together.

The most sophisticated approach isn't choosing one; it's understanding what each one answers, and using them in sequence. Think of the four test types as four lenses looking at the same subject: your body. Each reveals something the others can't.

TEST	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS	HOW IT FITS THE PICTURE
Blood	What is happening in my body today?	**The outcome measure.** Shows the current result of genetics, lifestyle and environment combined.
Diagnostic	Do I have this specific condition?	**Clinical confirmation.** Engaged when something needs investigation.
Lifestyle Genetic	What am I predisposed toward, permanently?	**The foundation.** A fixed lens that never changes and informs all other decisions.
Epigenetic	Is my lifestyle changing how my genes behave?	**The feedback loop.** Shows whether your interventions are working biologically.

THE PRACTICAL SEQUENCE

A logical order for most people.

For most people who are healthy and proactive about wellness, the most logical sequence looks like this:

1. Start with lifestyle genetic testing to understand your permanent biological blueprint.
2. Use those findings to inform which bloodwork panels are most relevant for your specific predispositions.
3. Track biomarkers over time to see whether your lifestyle is moving the needle.
4. Add epigenetic testing when you want biological confirmation that habits are working at the gene-expression level.
5. Engage diagnostic testing if and when a clinician needs to investigate a specific concern.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Genetics shows the predisposition. Epigenetics shows whether you're changing it. Blood shows the outcome. Diagnostics confirm what needs treatment.

WORKSHEET

Your personal testing roadmap.

Circle your situation, then follow the arrow to your next step.

○ I haven't done any genetic or epigenetic testing yet.	→	**Start with a genetic baseline plus an epigenetic snapshot.** A permanent genetic baseline plus an epigenetic snapshot, so you have something meaningful to build on from day one.
○ I've done bloodwork but never genetic testing.	→	**Add the genetic layer.** Your genes may explain patterns your bloodwork keeps showing. Genetic testing gives that deeper context for your next appointment.
○ I've done genetic and epigenetic testing. Are my changes working?	→	**Re-test your epigenetics over time.** Re-test every 3, 6 or 12 months and measure real biological progress over time.
○ I tested with another provider (e.g. 23andMe) and didn't get what I needed.	→	**Review what you already have first.** Before spending more, understand what you have and what, if anything, you still need.
○ I'm not sure where I fit, or have questions before committing.	→	**Start with the question.** Ask yourself what you're actually trying to find out, then choose the test that answers it.

A SHORT RECAP BEFORE YOU DECIDE

What you now know.

1. There are four distinct categories of testing (blood, diagnostic, lifestyle genetic, epigenetic), each answering a different question.

2. Choosing the wrong test rarely gives you bad data; it gives you answers to questions you weren't asking.

3. Lifestyle genetics is the highest-leverage starting point for most healthy, curious people. Test once. Use forever.

4. Epigenetics is the feedback loop: measurable proof that what you do daily is changing how your genes behave.

ONE THING

If you do nothing else, ask yourself: what am I actually trying to find out? Then choose the test that answers that question.

The next page is your invitation to act on it, when you're ready.

END OF GUIDE

You've been asking the right question all along. You just needed the right map.

WHEN YOU'RE READY

Explore GeneStyle tests at mygenestyle.com



Dr. Erika Gray, PharmD

GeneStyle co-founder and Chief Medical Officer

A licensed pharmacist with functional medicine training and hospital pharmacy experience, Erika co-founded GeneStyle to help people understand their biology through genetic and epigenetic testing, translating complex science into practical, plain-language guidance.

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