

Take Care of Your Thyroid

Thyroid dysfunction is one of the most common health problems today. It is also one that is most often missed by doctors. Hypothyroidism is far more prevalent than once thought. The latest estimates are that 20 million Americans have hypothyroidism, but the actual numbers are probably higher. Some experts claim that up to 40 percent of Americans have suboptimal thyroid function.

Did you know that depression, heart disease, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, PMS (premenstrual syndrome), menopausal symptoms, muscle and joint pains, irritable bowel syndrome, and autoimmune disease may indicate a problem with the thyroid gland? The classic signs of a sluggish thyroid include weight gain, lethargy, poor quality hair and nails, goiter (enlarged thyroid - noticeable on the lower neck), hair loss, dry skin, fatigue, cold hands and feet, and constipation. These symptoms are relatively well known.

However, some of the conditions you might not associate with your thyroid include:

- High cholesterol
- Irregular menstruation
- Low libido
- Infertility
- Gum disease
- Fluid retention
- Skin conditions such as acne and eczema
- Memory problems
- Poor stamina

So why are thyroid problems so common today? There are a number of possible factors. Iodine deficiency is often a major contributor. Our iodine intake levels have been reduced over the years due to a number of reasons:

- Diets low in fish, shellfish and seaweed (This isn't a problem in Japan where these foods are commonly eaten)
- Vegan and vegetarian diets
- Decreased use of iodized salt
- Less use of iodide in the food and agricultural industry
- Unfounded fears of iodine toxicity

Another major cause of low iodine levels is the competition of other specific chemicals in our diets and the environment. These include bromide, which is in nearly every commercial baked good. Potassium bromate is added as a dough conditioner to commercial flours, breads and baked goods and has been a huge contributor to bromide overload in Western cultures. The thyroid gland tends to pick up the toxic bromide rather than the iodine it needs to function well. The United States is well behind in putting an end to the practice of allowing bromine chemicals in foods and products whereas many other nations have taken the bull by the horns in dealing with this disruptive, toxic chemical. Great Britain, Canada and Brazil have all banned brominated flour and baked goods.

Other chemicals disruptive to thyroid function are chlorine and fluoride. Whether added to public water supplies or dental products, they also compete with iodine in the thyroid and other glands.

If the body attacks its own thyroid, the thyroid will be destroyed in time. This is an autoimmune problem. **Hyperthyroid** autoimmune disease is called **Graves Disease**. The standard medical treatment is to use drugs to retard thyroid hormone production or to partially or completely remove or kill the thyroid with surgery or radioactive iodine. Autoimmune **hypothyroid** disease is called **Hashimoto's Disease**. The medical treatment is to give the patient thyroid hormone (natural or synthetic). In both types of health problems, nothing is done to address the autoimmune response the body has created and the use of iodine supplementation is often restricted or eliminated.

Autoimmune related thyroid problems are very common in the United States. It is estimated that Hashimoto's makes up to 90% of all hypothyroid disease. It is beyond the reach of this article to fully address the treatment of autoimmune thyroid disease. However, let me say that there are natural ways to do this and that it is critical to your long term health to do more than just take a thyroid hormone if you have hypothyroid and it is certainly better to regulate a hyperactive thyroid than to destroy it.

Anyone can benefit by having a complete thyroid evaluation. This pertains especially to women, since they are more prone to thyroid problems. A thorough evaluation requires more in-depth testing than just the routine TSH blood test that is usually done by doctors. It also isn't safe just to determine thyroid health based on symptoms. Many people have thyroid problems without experiencing any noticeable symptoms.

Recently a female patient with no apparent symptoms was found to have pronounced Hashimoto's Disease (hypothyroid). She was the picture of health. Her condition was accidentally discovered when we did a routine blood test. Her TSH was over 90 (normal is around 2) yet she was slender, had great energy and beautiful healthy hair and skin. She had virtually no signs or symptoms of hypothyroid disease. Fortunately we found this problem before her thyroid was seriously damaged.

Don't put off taking care of your thyroid... all of your body's functions depend on it! Call today for a thyroid screening.

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