



THYROID FUNCTIONING

By Stephen Horne

Do You Have Thyroid Problems?

Check out these symptoms of thyroid problems. If you have a lot of symptoms in either category you may want to have your thyroid checked.

Symptoms of Low Thyroid (Hypothyroid)

- ✓ Brittle nails
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Dry skin
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Infertility
- ✓ Lack of concentration
- ✓ Loss of appetite
- ✓ Loss of sexual desire
- ✓ Low body temperature (cold limbs or intolerance of cold)
- ✓ Numbness or Tingling in hands and feet
- ✓ Painful PMS
- ✓ Recurrent Infections
- ✓ Slow heart rate
- ✓ Thinning hair
- ✓ Weight gain or difficulty losing weight

Symptoms of High Thyroid (Hyperthyroid)

- ✓ Feeling hot or intolerant of heat
- ✓ Hair loss
- ✓ Increased perspiration
- ✓ Insomnia and fatigue
- ✓ Nervousness and irritability
- ✓ Protruding eyeballs
- ✓ Rapid heart beat
- ✓ Weight loss

Sitting at the base of the neck is a butterfly shaped gland known as the thyroid. This important endocrine gland helps regulate metabolism, the rate at which the body burns fuel. It can be likened to the gas pedal on your car. When the thyroid is hyperactive, the body's engine races, burning hot and fast. When the thyroid activity is low, the body's engine sputters, runs slowly and stalls.

A malfunctioning thyroid gland can be the cause of many health problems. See the lists to the left. For hypothyroid, the most important symptoms are: **feeling cold and fatigue**. If you are tired and get cold easily, even when others feel hot, it is very likely you have low thyroid function. Other important symptoms of low thyroid are excess weight and difficulty losing weight, dry skin and thinning hair (hair loss).

For hyperthyroid, the feelings of **heat and nervousness** are important symptoms. Rapid heart beat is one of the more serious symptoms of hyperthyroid.

Thyroid problems are much more common in women than they are in men. About 90% of the people with thyroid disorders are women.

So, why are thyroid disorders so prevalent? While the exact reasons aren't clear, there are a number of causal factors to consider.

Iodine is essential to the production of thyroid hormones. This nutrient, while found in abundance in sea foods, is not found in high concentrations in plants or animals raised inland. Adding chemical iodine to salt, bread and milk products appears to have stopped instances of goiter (an enlargement of the thyroid due to iodine deficiency), but there may be some problems associated with the use of this chemical form of iodine over long periods of time.

Fluoride, chlorine and bromide are all found in the same group as iodine on the periodic table of elements. These elements are highly reactive and disrupt iodine in the body, so, the chlorination of water supplies and the use of fluorides may be a contributing factor.

Drugs, corticosteroids, Aspirin (salicylates) and **anticoagulants** can depress thyroid activity.

Whatever the causes, many thyroid problems can be addressed naturally without resorting to drugs, surgery or other medical treatments.

Understanding and Correcting Thyroid Imbalances

To understand how to deal effectively with thyroid conditions using natural substances, it is necessary to know a little bit about how the body produces thyroid hormones. The hypothalamus, a stalk of the brain, is the master regulator of most of the body's major endocrine hormones. When the hypothalamus detects the need for thyroid hormones, it produces the thyroid releasing hormone (TRH). The TRH travels to the pituitary gland where it stimulates the release of the thyroid stimulating hormone, TSH or thyrotrophin.

TSH travels through the bloodstream and binds to receptor sites in the thyroid gland. It stimulates the thyroid to produce two hormones – thyroxin (T4) and tri-iodotyrosine (T3). T4 and T3 are released in a ratio of about a 4:1 (4 times more T4 than T3). T3 is the more active form. T4 is a storage form of the hormone. T4 is converted to T3 in peripheral tissues, particularly the liver. Cortisol, a stress hormone, tends to stimulate the conversion of T4 to T3, while insulin tends to suppress the production of T4 to T3.

The thyroid can also produce relatively inactive reverse T3 (RT3). During times of grief, trauma and illness, the body produces more RT3 and less T3, presumably to conserve energy and force us to slow down.

The primary job of these thyroid hormones is to regulate metabolism and to help burn fuel, especially fats. The thyroid acts sort of like a metabolic thermostat. When the thyroid output is low, the fats tend to be stored instead of burned, resulting in weight gain. Since the body burns fat primarily to keep warm, the body temperature tends to be low. The skin is usually dry, again due to a lack of proper fat metabolism, because fats are what keep the skin moist and supple. Reproductive hormones may also be thrown out of balance (since they are made of fat) and energy levels tend to be low because the metabolism is slow.

Are you Deficient in Iodine?

When the body is low in iodine, it will soak it up readily from any source it can find. A simple folk test for iodine deficiency (or at least aggressive iodine uptake, which may be indicative of iodine deficiency) is to paint a patch of USP Tincture of Iodine two inches in diameter on a soft skin area (inner upper arm, side of the abdomen or inside of the thigh). If the patch disappears in less than two hours you are probably iodine deficient. If it disappears in two to four hours you may be moderately iodine deficient. If the patch doesn't absorb readily, you probably are getting enough iodine.

If you are deficient in iodine, the best way to get iodine is through natural foods, particularly fish from the ocean (not farm-raised) and seaweeds.

With hyperthyroid function, the opposite is true; the thermostat is set too high. As a result, fuel burns too quickly, which results in weight loss, intolerance to heat, and hyperactivity and restlessness. For example, some of the specific symptoms associated with Grave's disease (the most common hyperactive thyroid condition) include bulging eyes, rapid pulse rate (90-160), heart palpitations, tremors, restlessness and anxiety, lack of periods, muscle weakness and impaired sleep. The reason why heart rate is linked with thyroid function is because the heart prefers fatty acids over carbohydrates for fuel. So, when fat burning is hot, the heart is over stimulated. When fat burning is low, the heart tends to beat more slowly, too.

Solutions for Hypothyroid

When low thyroid is a problem, the first thing to try is increasing one's intake of dietary iodine. Adding foods rich in natural iodine to the diet will often improve thyroid function. While the primary use of iodine is in the thyroid gland, it may have other functions. For example, iodine is also concentrated around the nipples in female breast tissue and is critical to breast health. Iodine is also important for the immune system and helps the body fight infection.

Iodine is a very rare nutrient in land plants but is common in fish and sea vegetables like kelp, dulse, bladderwrack, and Irish moss. Sea vegetables, like kelp, can be sprinkled on food or added to soups, stews, etc. In many cases, simply adding plants (herbs) rich in iodine may not be enough. Often the problem is really in the pituitary gland.

Saliva tests are available at Options Center to determine thyroid function.

Solutions for Hyperthyroid

Hyperthyroid simply means that the thyroid is overproducing thyroid hormones and therefore over stimulating the metabolism. (You can think of it as having your foot stuck on the gas pedal.) There can be a number of causes for this, but the most common cause is Graves disease, which is an autoimmune condition.

A hyperactive condition of the thyroid, as is found in Grave's disease, is a serious medical condition and needs proper medical attention. The rapid heart beat can overstress the heart and circulation resulting in life-threatening effects. So, it is essential that a physician monitor someone with a hyperthyroid condition, even if the patient is opting to try a natural approach.

While it is important to have proper medical monitoring of a hyperthyroid situation, medical treatments for hyperactive thyroid conditions leave much to be desired. While drugs can be used to inhibit thyroid function, physicians usually convince the patient to destroy the thyroid gland with radioactive iodine.

This therapy is literally designed to "fry" the thyroid gland. The radioactive iodine is taken up by the thyroid gland, causing it to be irradiated and a large part of its tissue destroyed. Thereafter, the person will have to take medications for low thyroid, as the thyroid gland will no longer function properly. Obviously, there has to be a better way.

There are herbs which inhibit thyroid function. Several plant species contain substances known to bind to TSH receptor sites in the thyroid, inhibiting them and reducing thyroid output. These include bugleweed and lemon balm. However, just inhibiting the thyroid, even with herbs, isn't correcting the underlying problem or cause.

According to Dr. Henry Bieler in *Food is Your Best Medicine*, the glands act as a third line of immune defense. When toxins get past the intestinal membranes and the liver and enter the bloodstream, the glandular system becomes overexcited in an effort to increase metabolic rate in order to drive the toxins out of the body. So, according to this theory, a hyperactive thyroid would signal a need to cleanse the blood of toxins.

The adrenals tend to work with and balance the thyroid. I have discovered that people with hyperactive thyroid function also tend to have adrenal problems. The stress hormone, cortisol, is an anti-inflammatory, so hyperthyroidism may be a sign of excess stress, accompanied by adrenal weakness. So the cooling effect of the adrenal hormone, cortisol, is reduced. This is just a theory, but in the cases of hyperthyroid I have seen, adrenal weakness did seem to be a problem.

Diet can also play a role in helping to balance an overactive thyroid. High carbohydrate diets, coupled with low protein and/or fat intake, tend to elevate thyroid function. So, a properly balanced diet with correct proportions of fats, proteins, and low glycemic carbohydrates is helpful.

Cruciferous vegetables, such as cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower tend to have an inhibiting effect on the production of thyroid hormones. Millet also has a slight thyroid inhibiting effect. These foods should be consumed freely. Milk, bread, salt, and other products which contain large amounts of chemical iodine should be avoided by those with hyperthyroid.

Contrary to what some people say, it is not wise for hyperthyroid patients to supplement with iodine of any kind.

One final word of caution is that there are some reports that aspartame may cause hyperthyroid disorders. So, products containing the artificial sweetener aspartame (a/k/a Equal and NutraSweet) should also be avoided.

Again, hyperthyroid conditions can be serious and life-threatening, so the situation should be monitored by a physician to make certain the therapy is working, even when the person chooses to go the natural route.

Summary

Thyroid problems can be helped naturally, but serious thyroid problems should be monitored by a qualified health practitioner.

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- by Stephen Horne

Helen can help decide if the saliva test for the thyroid is appropriate for you. Call Options to make an appointment.

YOUR THYROID GLAND AND SYNTHROID

By Dr. Bruce West
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One of the most common questions I get is, "Can I take nutrition for my thyroid gland while I am taking the prescription drug Synthroid?" The answer is always **yes**. For decades, when it comes to the thyroid gland, most of the medical profession has only been interested in one of its hormones – thyroxin. Most likely because the pharmaceutical industry has produced a synthetic version of this thyroid hormone – Synthroid.

When the thyroid gland can no longer function or has been destroyed by surgery or radiation, Synthroid can be a blessing. But thyroxin is only one of the hormones produced by the thyroid gland. It also produces **calcitonin**, the hormone that helps regulate calcium, maintaining its balance in the bones for a healthy skeleton.

Because of osteoporosis, a healthy thyroid gland that produces adequate amounts of thyroid hormones – including calcitonin – is essential. For this reason, unless your thyroid gland has been removed or completely destroyed – with no possibility of functioning again – you must do everything nutritionally possible to maintain and/or improve thyroid function, **whether you are taking Synthroid or not**.

While Synthroid will provide the major thyroid hormone, it will not take the place of the myriad of other functions this gland does on a daily basis. So even if your gland can no longer produce adequate amounts of thyroxin, it is in your best interest to help it to produce calcitonin and to perform other functions that we may not even know of or understand.

What About Pig Thyroid?

Today we have desiccated thyroid hormone preparations from animals. Perhaps Armour is the most popular. Most physicians shun this medication because it is not as easily measured, and because they do not know how to prescribe it. You will generally need a holistic physician who understands how to use this drug. Yet for lots of women, this medication works best because it is whole desiccated thyroid – which means that it will provide more than just thyroxin alone.

But even if you are taking pig thyroid, it is still not the same as your own thyroid function. There are always problems with thyroid drugs – too much, too little, too tired, too jittery, and on and on

– giving you more reasons to improve your own thyroid gland’s function. No matter how old you are, when you remove thyroid poisons and take in thyroid fuels, you can often improve your thyroid function.

If your gland has not been surgically or medically (radiation) destroyed, and if you’ve not been on thyroid hormone for decades, you have a chance to improve thyroid function. And if you are one of the lucky ones, you may be able to reduce your medication, or in the best of worlds, get off thyroid hormone drugs altogether.

Treat Your Thyroid Naturally

So whether you are taking Synthroid, Levothyroid, or Armour, also treat your thyroid nutritionally. It is relatively easy – simply eliminate thyroid poisons and start using a supplement that serves as fuel for your thyroid gland. Thyroid poisons are, for the most part, chlorine and sodium fluoride. Thyroid fuels are similar compounds, the most critical of which is organic (Prolamine) iodine.

Get the chlorine out of your showering water with a shower dechlorinator. And get the chlorine and sodium fluoride out of your drinking water with a Reverse Osmosis water purifier.

Additionally, provide your thyroid with the fuel it needs with organic iodine- containing phytonutrients and a thyroid extract (protomorphogen) which does not contain hormones. Organic iodine is available at Options.

If you have a problem with TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone), the problem may be caused by the pituitary or some other gland in your thyroid-hormone system. There are supplements to correct TSH problems.

If your problem is an overactive thyroid gland or an “autoimmune” thyroid problem, the causes are often the same. With a frank case of hyperthyroid, you owe it to yourself to try everything possible before submitting to surgery or radiation. In this case, again there are natural food supplements that can be used.

To help hyperthyroid, try thyroid inhibiting foods. We recommend drinking a cup of freshly squeezed cabbage juice (can be diluted in other juice) twice daily. Also take a supplement that is a concentrated form of Brussels sprouts and kale. If your condition is not an emergency, allow six months to slow down an overactive thyroid gland.

So, “Should I take nutrition for my thyroid gland while I am taking Synthroid?” Absolutely!

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