

Influences on your Thyroid Health

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January is Thyroid Awareness Month. Let's deposit a bit of thyroid knowledge into your bank of health wisdom.

Your thyroid gland is a butterfly-shaped endocrine gland located in the front base of the neck. Its function regulates metabolic functions of the body through virtually every cell. Everything from your brain to your cholesterol, bones and skin are affected by its hormones.

Signs of *hyperthyroid* (overactive) include unintentional weight loss, nervousness, high blood pressure, fatigue and muscle weakness, impaired fertility, menstrual disturbances and insomnia.

Signs of *hypothyroid* (sluggish) include unexplained weight gain, low body temperature, constipation, depression, thin/brittle hair and fingernails, weakness and joint stiffness.

The medical model looks to a blood test for a diagnosis, the taking of a synthetic thyroid hormone as the answer. The thyroid is, however, rarely a stand alone issue.

The thyroid is in relationship and communication with a myriad of organs. For example, the thyroid is *guided* by the pituitary gland residing in your head. It is *supported* by the adrenal glands sitting atop your kidneys. The thyroid is also *dependent* upon the liver to conjugate (take apart and put back together in needed form) its hormones for proper use in the body

If any of these organs are overworked themselves, they can't properly support the thyroid gland and the proper conversion of its hormones. Our thyroid hormone levels will falter as a result. To focus on taking a thyroid hormone if there is a more pertinent organ calling for help is not the answer. Although you may feel better for a while, if the underlying cause hasn't been addressed, the body will do its best to get your attention in another way. Your medication list will soon be expanding.

Diet plays a major role in your thyroid health. Iodine, the mineral of choice by the thyroid, was found to be low in thyroid patients. Iodized salt created to solve the problem. It has not proven to be the answer.

There are a number of foods known as *goitrogens* that block iodine absorption. Peanuts, peanut butter, soybeans (used most often in prepared foods as textured vegetable proteins) and soybean oil top the list. One epidemiological study has revealed that teenaged children with a diagnosis of autoimmune thyroid disease

were significantly more likely to have received soy formula as infants. Soy is not the wonder food it has been proclaimed to be.

Fats play an important role in thyroid health. Ray Peat PhD, a physiologist who has worked with dietary influences on hormones since 1968, reports that the polyunsaturated oils (long chained fatty acids) touted for their health benefits actually interfere with thyroid function. They do this by blocking thyroid hormone secretion as well as the hormone's movement in the circulatory system. Even the response of the body's tissues to the hormone is interfered with by unsaturated fats in the diet.

Livestock feed includes these polyunsaturated fats/soybean oil for their "fatten them up" properties. In our cultural demand for leaner meats, one approach showed that leaner pork could be produced by reducing the pig's intake of soybean oil and replacing it with saturated animal fat.

Excellent for the thyroid is coconut oil. Coconut oil is a saturated fat made up of medium chain triglycerides known to stimulate metabolism and promote weight loss. Adding one tablespoon per day to the diets of those with low thyroid function can often bring very beneficial results.

Environmental stressors such as chemical pollutants, mercury and fluoride also play havoc with the thyroid. There is growing body of evidence that the fluoride, which we seem intent on adding to our water supply, inhibits thyroid function. Mercury diminishes thyroid function by displacing the trace mineral selenium needed for a thyroid hormone (T4) conversion to its active and functioning form (T3).

A thorough look at a thyroid imbalance should include an investigation as to *why* it is not functioning well. There are lab tests designed to look at underlying causes, reputable hair analyses to address the possibility of heavy metals and imbalances in the body's mineral levels. Good nutritional counseling can help you nourish your body and thyroid. "It's genetic" is just not an acceptable answer.