

**TAKE
CONTROL OF
YOUR HEALTH:
KEEP YOUR
THYROID
IN BALANCE.**



What you need to know about identifying, treating, and living with thyroid disease.



American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists

 Abbott Laboratories

JANUARY 2004 IS THYROID AWARENESS MONTH

Your thyroid gland

Every time you look in the mirror, a key to your well-being is staring you in the face: your

thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is a small, butterfly-shaped gland located at the base of your neck just below your Adam's apple. Your thyroid gland helps control the function of many of your body's most important organs,

including your heart, brain, liver,

kidneys, and skin. Making sure that your thyroid gland is healthy and functioning properly is important to your body's overall well-being.

This brochure contains answers to commonly asked questions about thyroid health and will help you understand the role your thyroid gland plays in your health. The questions and answers will illustrate how you and your doctor can

partner to identify your risk for thyroid disease, how to best treat your condition if you are

diagnosed, and how to live an active and fulfilling life by keeping your thyroid in balance.

Be sure to speak to your doctor or nurse if you think you are at risk for thyroid disease or if you are being treated for thyroid disease and are experiencing symptoms. If you are currently being treated for thyroid disease, make sure you follow your doctor's instructions – take the exact medicine your doctor prescribed every day.



than you might think.



IDENTIFYING THE SYMPTOMS AND RISKS OF THYROID DISEASE

What follows are commonly asked questions and answers about the importance of your thyroid health and the prevalence of thyroid disease to help you identify if you are at risk.

QUESTION How common is thyroid disease?

ANSWER *Thyroid disease is more common than diabetes or heart disease. Thyroid disease is a fact of life for 27 million Americans – and more than half of those people remain undiagnosed. Women are 5 times more likely than men to suffer from hypothyroidism (when the thyroid gland is not producing enough thyroid hormone). Aging is just one risk factor that can contribute to hypothyroidism. Review the AACE Thyroid Screener included with this booklet, which includes 2 full lists of symptoms and risk factors associated with thyroid disease.*

QUESTION How important is my thyroid in my overall well-being?

ANSWER *The thyroid gland produces thyroid hormone, which controls virtually every cell, tissue, and organ in the body. If your thyroid is not functioning properly, it can produce too much thyroid hormone, which causes the body's systems to speed up – this is called hyperthyroidism; or it can create too little thyroid hormone, which causes the body's systems to slow down – this is called hypothyroidism. If your thyroid gland isn't working properly, neither will you.*

Untreated thyroid disease may lead to elevated cholesterol levels and subsequent heart disease, as well as infertility and osteoporosis. Research also shows that there is a strong genetic link between thyroid disease and other autoimmune diseases, including types of diabetes, arthritis, and anemia.

QUESTION How do you know if you have a thyroid problem?

ANSWER *First, understand how to recognize the symptoms and risk factors of thyroid disease. Included with this brochure is a card with specific symptoms and risk factors, including those for patients currently undergoing treatment for thyroid disorders to determine if their thyroid hormone levels are being maintained. Since many symptoms may be hidden, the best way to know for sure is to ask your doctor for a TSH (thyroid-stimulating hormone) test, a simple blood test to verify your thyroid gland's condition. Because thyroid disease often runs in families, examinations of your family members may reveal other individuals with thyroid problems.*

QUESTION Who should have a TSH test?

ANSWER *Individuals over the age of 35 and those who have any symptoms or risk factors associated with thyroid disease should talk to their doctor about undergoing a TSH test. Included with this brochure is a card with symptoms and risk factors associated with thyroid disease.*

TREATING THYROID DISEASE

The first step toward taking control of your thyroid health is identifying whether your thyroid hormone levels are in balance. The second step is to recognize that there are effective treatments to manage thyroid disease, as long as you follow your doctor's instructions.

QUESTION

How is hypothyroidism usually treated?

ANSWER

Hypothyroidism is treated by replacing the body's thyroid hormone with a single daily dose of levothyroxine sodium (LT₄). In order to ensure consistent treatment, your doctor may prescribe a specific brand of LT₄ to treat your thyroid disease, and will prescribe the correct dose to keep your thyroid in balance. Since most cases of thyroid disease are permanent and often progressive, it is necessary to treat the disorder throughout one's lifetime. Periodic monitoring of TSH levels is necessary to ensure that the proper LT₄ dose is being given, since medicine doses may have to be adjusted from time to time to ensure proper treatment. Precise dosing is critical since the body is sensitive to even small changes in thyroid hormone levels.

QUESTION

What causes hypothyroidism?

ANSWER

Hypothyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland does not produce enough thyroid hormone. The most common cause of hypothyroidism is an autoimmune disease called Hashimoto's thyroiditis, in which the body's immune system attacks the thyroid. Hypothyroidism can also be caused by some treatments of hyperthyroidism

because the remaining active thyroid cells cannot produce enough thyroid hormone. In addition, hypothyroidism can be caused by certain medicines such as lithium, iodine, and amiodarone. Hypothyroidism can temporarily arise after pregnancy or if the thyroid is inflamed due to a viral infection. This disease can also be present at birth, and tends to run in families.

QUESTION

What can affect my thyroid disease treatment results?

ANSWER

To reach optimal treatment results, it is important to take your medicine as instructed by your doctor. Do not stop taking your thyroid medicine, even if you feel better, without talking to your doctor first. It is important to stay on the exact dose and brand of medicine your doctor prescribes to help avoid any variations in your thyroid hormone levels. Thyroid hormone imbalance can result from untreated thyroid disease, or from over- or under-treatment. In addition, various medicines and supplements may affect the absorption of thyroid hormone; therefore, you should talk to your doctor about any medicines and supplements you are taking and about the best time of day to take your thyroid medicine if you are taking other medicines.

LIVING WITH THYROID DISEASE

The fact is, millions of people with thyroid disease are living active, healthy lives because they have taken control of their health and keep their thyroid in balance.

QUESTION Can thyroid disease be cured?

ANSWER *No. Unfortunately, the majority of people with thyroid disease will not be cured of their condition. The good news is that both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism can be controlled. Patients with these conditions often remark that with therapy, they feel like they've rediscovered the life they lost. Hypothyroid patients on therapy can expect to lead a full and normal life.*

QUESTION Is it difficult to “keep my thyroid in balance?”

ANSWER *No, but it does require effort by the patient. If you are diagnosed with thyroid disease, be sure to take your thyroid medicine as instructed by your doctor, and refill your prescription on time so that you do not miss any doses. Your doctor may want to run TSH tests every 6 to 12 months to monitor your thyroid levels. Your body is sensitive to small changes in your TSH level and your thyroid medicine. In fact, thyroid medicines are measured in 1 one-millionth of a gram. Taking your medicine daily or as prescribed by your doctor, staying on the brand of thyroid medicine your doctor prescribed, and visiting your doctor every 6 to 12 months or as symptoms arise are the best ways to keep your thyroid in balance.*

QUESTION Once I'm taking a thyroid medicine, can I switch brands of thyroid medicine without my doctor's advice?

ANSWER *No, and there's an important reason why. Thyroid medicines are precisely dosed to meet your individual thyroid needs. Not all thyroid medicines deliver the same amount of thyroid hormone; therefore, switching medicines should only be done under the guidance of a doctor, and additional testing and dosage adjustment may be required to ensure you are receiving the amount of thyroid hormone your body needs. Even though 2 thyroid hormone replacement pills from different companies look the same and are the same dose, they may not perform in exactly the same way in your body. Therefore, it is important for you to know your medicine brand and dose, and ensure when you pick up your prescription at the pharmacy you are getting exactly what your doctor prescribed. This is especially important for elderly patients, patients with cardiovascular conditions or thyroid cancer, and pregnant patients. Changing brands of thyroid medicine without your doctor's supervision could cause you to receive too much or too little thyroid hormone, which may lead to a return of symptoms and other potential health problems.*

QUESTION What can I do to keep my thyroid in balance?

ANSWER *Speak candidly with your doctor about your family history, symptoms, and how you are feeling. If you have already been diagnosed, your priorities are to stay on therapy and stay on your brand of thyroid medicine, take it as your doctor has prescribed, and visit with your doctor regularly.*



January is Thyroid Awareness Month and is sponsored by the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists (AACE). AACE is a not-for-profit national organization of highly qualified specialists in hormonal and metabolic disorders. Our primary goal is to provide high-quality specialty care to patients with endocrine problems such as thyroid disease.



THE FIRST STEP IN TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR THYROID HEALTH IS TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS AND RISKS.

Take a moment to review the symptoms and risk-factor checklists on the following 2 pages. Share the results with your doctor.



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Ayala AR, Wartofsky L. The case for more aggressive screening and treatment of mild thyroid failure. *Cleve Clin J Med.* 2002;69:313-320.
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Is your thyroid disease under control?

If you are currently being treated for thyroid disease, do you have any of the following symptoms? If you do, discuss them with your doctor.

Possible symptoms of over-treated hypothyroidism:

- Nervousness/irritability
- Irregular heart beat
- Heat intolerance
- Increased sweating
- Unexplained weight loss
- Diarrhea
- Sleeplessness
- Thyroid enlargement
- Decreased menstrual flow
- Impaired fertility

Possible symptoms of under-treated hypothyroidism:

- Fatigue
- Unexplained weight gain
- Dry skin and hair
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased cholesterol
- Depression
- Cold intolerance
- Constipation
- Vague aches and pains
- Increased menstrual flow

Over- or under-treatment risk factors:

- You changed to a different thyroid medicine and have not had a new TSH test
- You received a different thyroid medicine at the pharmacy than your doctor prescribed and you have not had a new TSH test
- You recently started taking new medicines prescribed by another doctor
- You recently started taking vitamins or herbal remedies and your doctor is not aware of them
- Your thyroid medicine looks different from your previous medicine

If you checked any of these risk factors or symptoms, you may need a new TSH test or dose adjustment to ensure your thyroid is in balance. To avoid over- or under-treatment, take your medicine every day and stay on the brand and dose of thyroid medicine your doctor prescribed.

Are you at risk for thyroid disease?

Do you have any of the following signs and symptoms? If you do, discuss them with your doctor.

Hypothyroid and Hyperthyroid Risk Factors

Hypothyroidism:

- Fatigue
- Unexplained weight gain
- Dry skin and hair
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased cholesterol
- Depression
- Always feeling cold
- Constipation
- Vague aches and pains
- Heavy menstrual flow

Hyperthyroidism:

- Nervousness/irritability
- Irregular heart beat
- Heat intolerance
- Increased sweating
- Unexplained weight loss
- Diarrhea
- Sleeplessness
- Thyroid enlargement
- Decreased menstrual flow
- Impaired fertility

Thyroid Disease Risk Factors

Do you have any of the following risk factors?

- Previous thyroid dysfunction
- Goiter
- Surgery or radiotherapy affecting the thyroid gland
- Diabetes mellitus
- Pernicious anemia
- Coarse or thinning hair
- Use of medicines such as lithium carbonate or iodine-containing compounds
- History of head or neck irradiations
- Family history of thyroid disease

If you have any of these signs and symptoms or risk factors, you may have undiagnosed thyroid disease. If you think you are at risk, ask your doctor for a TSH test. Now is the time to take control of your health.



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