

Hypothyroidism or Hashimoto's?

The Thyroid is a small gland at the base of your neck. It's a part of the endocrine system, and specifically acts to affect our metabolic rate.

Hypothyroidism

If the thyroid is under-active, we can have trouble losing weight (though some of us remain thin), hair falls out more than usual (including eyebrows), both hair and nails lack lustre and can become brittle, energy and mental clarity are low, and we can feel anxious or depressed.

Clinical hypothyroidism is diagnosed using a lab test called Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH). The active forms of thyroid hormone, T3 and T4, are often also tested. Levothyroxin (often called Eltroxin or Synthroid) is the most commonly prescribed medication for clinical hypothyroidism. It's a synthetic form of T4.

Subclinical hypothyroidism is more difficult to detect because TSH, T3, and T4 are still within normal limits. Symptoms are present, but to a lesser degree than they are in clinical hypothyroidism. However much can be done at this point, before the problem manifests into a clinical dysfunction that requires thyroid medication. Body temperature tends to be lower than normal in subclinical hypothyroidism, even if a person gets hot flashes.

Autoimmune Hypothyroidism

Autoimmune hypothyroidism, often called Hashimoto's, is a dysfunction in the immune system that affects thyroid function in some way. Thyroid peroxidase antibody (anti-TPO) is something I find quite often in blood work. *Thyroid peroxidase antibodies* attack an enzyme called thyroid peroxidase, which is involved in converting inactive thyroid hormone to its active form. *Thyroglobulin antibody* is another way the immune system can affect thyroid function. Thyroglobulin is a protein used in the production of active thyroid hormones, and thyroglobulin antibody destroys this important protein.

Hashimoto's thyroiditis is a state of inflammation in the thyroid gland itself, which causes a gradual decline in thyroid function. There may not be any symptoms. However if you feel heat in the throat region with elevated blood pressure and heart palpitations/feelings of anxiety, see your doctor immediately.

Some believe that autoimmune hypothyroidism can be prevented by ensuring that our detoxification mechanisms are intact. This means that the body is fully capable of eliminating toxic substances such as pesticides and pollutants.

Food sensitivities have been loosely linked to autoimmune hypothyroidism. In clinical practice I consistently see people with both hypothyroidism and food sensitivities. Gluten is the food I most commonly discover to be problematic when anti-TPO is elevated. Gluten sensitivity and celiac disease are not the same thing. It's important to note that I don't believe everyone should be on a gluten free diet, only those that need to be.

For those of you who are familiar with iodine, it's important to note that iodine supplementation can be harmful in some states of autoimmune hypothyroidism. It's true that iodine depletion has been linked to both functional and autoimmune hypothyroidism, but this doesn't mean that restoring iodine in the system is going to solve the problem. Don't take iodine unless you're under close supervision by an MD or ND that is well-read on the subject.

Adaptability & The State of Exhaustion

There are a number of reasons a thyroid can become under-active. One of them is chronic stress or overwork. The adrenals can come in to play with hypothyroidism, as well as our ability to regulate blood sugar.

What Seems Simple Is Not Always So

On the surface hypothyroidism can seem simple, but there is actually a lot at play, and all factors should be considered if optimal thyroid function is the goal.

-Dr. Angela, ND