

How to Know if Your Thyroid is the Problem



Episode 51: How to Know if Your Thyroid is the Problem with Gregory Anne Cox

How to know if it's your thyroid

[According to the American Thyroid Association.](#)

- Up to 60 percent of those with thyroid disease are unaware of their condition.
- Women are five to eight times more likely than men to have thyroid problems.
- One woman in eight will develop a thyroid disorder during her lifetime.
- One in four adults over 65 have some sort of thyroid dysfunction. But other factors, like better diagnostics and longer life expectancy, can make it tricky to tell.

- The majority of these patients have hypothyroidism — too little hormone production — while a small percentage suffer from hyperthyroidism (too much hormone production).

Symptoms like weight gain, poor sleep, loss of hair, feeling cold, fatigue, and general malaise are not all in your head, but the cause may be found nearby. That tiny butterfly shaped gland, located in the throat, known as your thyroid is the unsung heroin of the healthy, happy woman.

Many a visit to a traditionally trained physician in search of answers to why one is experiencing these symptoms have ended in, say it with me, “It’s all in your head’ or “It’s just what happens at your age.”

You know where you imagine winging something at the annoying person saying stupid things?

#nowisagoodtime

Never one to advocate violence I’ve pulled together a guide to getting help, to getting answers that can change your health and restore your shiny personality to its former luster.

First a word or two about why I call the thyroid an unsung heroin.

The thyroid’s role in the body is to regulate the body’s metabolism and calcium balance. According to [Dr. Chris Kesser](#), “**Every cell in the body** has receptors for thyroid hormone. Thyroid hormone directly acts on the brain, the G.I. tract, the cardiovascular system, bone metabolism, red blood cell metabolism, gall bladder and liver function, steroid hormone production, glucose metabolism, lipid and cholesterol metabolism, protein metabolism, and body temperature regulation.”

What Dr. Kesser does not include his list but I believe should be on it, is the effect that thyroid function has on mental health. According to Drs. Richard and Karilee Shames, in their book, *Thyroid Mind Power, The Proven Cure for Hormone-Related Depression, Anxiety, and Memory Loss*, “Thyroid imbalance is a medical condition that often carries

with it a variety of well-studied psychological symptoms. Millions of people face emotional havoc due to simple untreated or poorly treated thyroid imbalances.” Dr. Ridha Arem, MD author of *The Thyroid Solution* says, “It is time for thyroid hormones to be recognized as key brain chemicals, whose actions and effects are similar in many ways to serotonin and other neuro-transmitters.”

When there is too little or too much thyroid hormone, you can see from the above list that many areas of the body and the mind can be impacted. Too much thyroid hormone, called hyperthyroidism, results in nervousness, heart palpitations, excessive sweating, unexplained weight loss, and feeling hot. Too little does the opposite. Hypothyroid sufferers will be cold, are prone to weight gain, become listless or foggy brained, and constipated. It’s usually these quality of life issues that send us to the doctor for tests.

Which brings me to a sticky wicket. Blood tests, the kind you get annually using venous blood, are woefully inadequate when it comes to diagnosing thyroid imbalances.

Unless you are obviously on the high or low sides of the standard tests—TSH or Thyroid stimulating hormone and sometimes T3—you risk going undiagnosed.

Google your symptoms and you might come across an article on a well-known, trustworthy site like the Harvard Health newsletter. While I respect the training that this MD has, and that there are always two sides to every argument, her thesis—that too many people are being tested and treated for hypothyroid symptoms, and her reliance on the TSH test results as the gold standard, will leave millions of women suffering with quality of life symptoms and put them at risk of serious problems like heart disease.

Her final prognosis, “According to most guidelines, a TSH below 10 provides good reassurance that a person does not have hypothyroidism.”

Whose guidelines I don’t know but I know countless hypothyroid patients who don’t feel well until their TSH is below 2! Myself included.

Even then, many doctors are not educated in the treatment of thyroid problems. You may have all the classic symptoms of hypothyroidism and a “normal” TSH result so you’ll get sent home with either an anti-depressant or a suggestion for lifestyle change

such as eat less, exercise more, if you are cold put on a sweater. Really people, is that okay?

Not in my book so I went to work when I was that person above.

Let's say you have a doc who agrees that based on your symptoms, your TSH # may not be telling the whole story. Ask this doc if they will run a full thyroid panel. This will reveal how well your pituitary gland—the gland that produces actual thyroid hormone—is responding to TSH—thyroid stimulating hormone, and how well this hormone is being used by the body vs bound up and unusable. Once you have a complete picture your doc—if he or she is fluent in thyroid health—will prescribe replacement hormone therapy and lifestyle changes.

My experience tells me it won't be easy to find such a doc but you might.

If not, here are my trusted resources for information, testing, and support.

They won't be able to prescribe medication but you will be able to go to your doc with information supporting your request to try their suggestions. You'll make it easy for them and they might even thank you for bringing this kind of information to their attention.

Resources

[Dr. Chris Kresser](#) for information on all things functional medicine but specific to this post, he has a great ebook on why people get thyroid disease, what stresses out the thyroid, testing, meds, herbs, etc.

[Mary Shomon](#) is a lay person but decades long thyroid health advocate and coach for those struggling with hypothyroidism. She has books, runs classes, and offers coaching including reading thyroid labs. I interviewed her for the podcast. [Find it here.](#)

Izabella Wentz specializes in Hashimoto's thyroiditis which is the autoimmune form of hypothyroidism. She recommends lifestyle, natural foods and supplements for healing and dealing with Hashi's.

[Dr. Richard Shames](#), as mentioned above, is a thyroid expert who offers virtual consultations after testing. He was the first doc I consulted after interviewing him for a summit and I'm forever grateful for his insights and recommendations. You might want to start with his book, [Thyroid Mind Power, The Proven Cure of Hormone-Related Depression and Memory Loss](#).

Finally, [Stop The Thyroid Madness](#), Janie Bowthorpe's website. In her words, the INFORMATIONAL MOTHERSHIP WEBSITE OF REPORTED PATIENT EXPERIENCES, OBSERVATIONS, AND WISDOM GAINED WORLDWIDE! It's a haven for those who can't get treated satisfactorily or who need ammo to take to a doc in what else might be a better drug or dose for them. You feel heard here and will get answers.

Here's what I'll end with. Do not give up if you've been told you are "fine" after blood work and still feel poorly, can't lose weight, etc. Hormones are a complex aspect of health, may take time to get back to fully functional, but so worth every moment it takes to arrive there.

Please let me know if you want to chat about this—there's no charge—I will listen to what's going on and give you next steps. Maybe even help you realize you are not crazy and this is not just a function of aging.