

[IMAGE]

Protect Your Thyroid

By Julie T. Chen, MD

In my clinic of integrative medicine in San Jose Calif., I frequently get requests from patients to check their thyroid whenever someone feels tired, is losing their hair, has unhealthy weak nails, has anxiety or depression and if they think they are gaining weight for no reason or are unable to lose weight. Interestingly, my patients are very astute and have done their homework in looking up common symptoms of abnormal thyroid functioning. In a nut shell, that little gland at the base of our neck controls a whole lot of functions in our body...hence if something feels off, usually the thyroid is an organ that is frequently checked.

The thyroid is an endocrine organ and what that means is that it produces hormones. The hormones produced by the thyroid include something called T3 and T4. Many factors affect our thyroid functioning such as foods that block thyroid action or foods that are needed to give the essential nutrients necessary for healthy abundant thyroid functioning. So, essentially, food is important in regards to our thyroid functioning. Selenium, iodine, magnesium, and amino acids like tyrosine are all important fundamental building blocks of thyroid functioning; but foods like the artificial sweeteners or soy in excess can block thyroid activity.

Thyroid affects our mood, sleep cycle, metabolism, as well as the health of our bone, skin, hair, nail, heart, and our gastrointestinal tract. Some typical symptoms of hyperactive thyroid called hyperthyroidism can include diarrhea, anxiety, insomnia, weight loss, excessive sweatiness or heat intolerance, fatigue, weakness, just to name a few symptoms. Comparatively, an underactive thyroid or those with hypothyroidism can experience weight gain, constipation, fatigue, sluggishness, difficulty with memory, cold intolerance, dry skin, hair and nails, and sleep alteration as well.

Thyroid - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark With the organ affecting so many aspects of our body, if you are concerned about your thyroid health, you should not hesitate in contacting your physician for an evaluation. If you feel that your thyroid gland has nodules or is enlarged, you should see an endocrinologist as soon as possible for an evaluation to rule out masses and cancer or an over- or under-active gland.

You need not feel helpless though if you are concerned about your thyroid. With modern medicine, identification of abnormal levels using blood work and thyroid scans are very frequently done and with the help of your physician, you will be on your way to figuring out your thyroid health in no time.

As for what you can do at home to protect your thyroid, make sure your diet is rich in antioxidant foods such as fruits, vegetables, healthy plant fats and proteins found in foods like nuts, quinoa and avocados, and water. Avoid foods that have preservatives or dyes or artificial sweeteners or ingredients. Make sure you are getting plenty of sleep, monitor your stress level and take time out for relaxation, and make sure you are getting in some exercise regularly.

If you make an effort in your daily life such as the steps mentioned above, between you and your healthcare practitioner, you should be well-armed in your battle against thyroid disease. It may be a good idea to ask your family members about your family history and see if thyroid disease runs in the family. If it does, you should make sure you are regularly examined by your physician.

A yearly physical is a good idea for everyone...especially if your family history suggests various health concerns you should be keeping an eye on. So, as we round out 2012, make a resolution to find and stay with a primary care doctor that you trust and like so that you and your doctor can become the disease-battling team your body needs to keep it in tip top shape all year round, every year.

Dr. Julie T. Chen is board-certified in internal medicine and fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, Calif. She is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of Web sites and nonprofit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates various healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, Chinese scalp acupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more, visit www.makinghealthyez.com.

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