

[IMAGE]

Pay Attention to Your Thyroid

By Julie T. Chen, MD

Our thyroid gland is an essential part to our everyday functioning. It is a part of our endocrine/hormone system and our endocrine system is intricately linked to almost every organ in our body. Our thyroid gland is located in the front of our throat and it helps regulate our metabolism, heart rate, sleep, skin health, hair health, energy level, our mood, and even our menstrual cycle, just to name a few functions.

Some common symptoms of low thyroid function (aka hypothyroidism) is dry skin, constipation, menstrual cycle changes, dry hair, fatigue, and weight gain. Alternatively, some common symptoms of high thyroid function (aka hyperthyroidism) can be diarrhea, anxiety, insomnia, palpitations, shortness of breath, chest pressure, proximal muscle weakness, fatigue, irregular periods, and even hair changes such as hair loss.

So, as you can see, our thyroid organ is very important in our overall daily sense of wellbeing. When it is disrupted, it can affect us in an extreme and significant way. Now that we know the thyroid is so very important to our overall health, how can we make sure we keep it healthy?

First, ask your family whether you have any family history of any thyroid disease. If you do have family history of thyroid disease, you should ask your doctor to test your thyroid function and for any potential markers for autoimmune thyroid disease.

If your thyroid function is normal, you should make sure to keep it healthy by eating the right foods and doing the right things in your daily life to keep it in good shape. So, what are the things you should be doing?

There are certain foods that block thyroid functioning. You should avoid processed foods, excess soy, and artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, just to name a few. Equally important are eating foods high in selenium, magnesium and iodine. A word of caution, you should not take any iodine supplements if you have been told by your doctor that you have the autoimmune thyroid disease called Hashimoto's Thyroiditis. If you have that disease, taking iodine may further disrupt your thyroid functioning.

If you have actual thyroid disease, you should focus on eating a mostly vegetable plant-based diet that is anti-inflammatory and ask your doctor about medications and supplements that may help your either hyper- or hypothyroidism status.

There are a lot more drugs out in the market place now and if you have low thyroid functioning, I am a big proponent of taking one that has both T3 and T4 activity if you have low T3 level activity as well as low T4 activity (T4 and T3 are types of thyroid hormones that we have in our body and they affect how we feel). Frequently, patients may not be able to convert T4 to T3 by themselves; so if that happens, there's a chance that you may still not feel your best even with normal lab numbers if you are only taking a T4 medication.

Lastly, our adrenal function can affect how we feel and it strongly interacts with our thyroid so that if you have hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism but your labs are now normal with treatments but you still don't feel well, you should ask your endocrinologist or doctor to check your adrenal functioning as well.

Ultimately, the most important things you can do for your thyroid health, not to mention all your other organs as well, is to make sure you get plenty of rest and relaxation every day, make time to exercise with permission by your doctor to start it if you've not been doing it regularly, make sure to stay hydrated, and eat a mostly vegetable-based diet that is anti-inflammatory. If you make these a MUST in your life, your organs will likely make keeping you feeling good a MUST as well.

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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