

# Hypothyroid and Hashimoto's Disease

Last month discussed the foundation of health, which included a functioning digestive system, balanced blood sugar, stress reduction and the importance of essential fatty acids. To continue describing the interdependence of the many systems of



*All's Well*  
Health for Body, Mind, Spirit

by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

the body, I want to discuss hypothyroidism, Hashimoto's Disease and adrenal function.

The thyroid gland acts as the engine of the body. It regulates metabolism, which is the way the body uses energy. Thyroid hormones affect nearly every organ in the body. The thyroid gland produces Thyroxine (T4) and Triiodothyronine (T3), which is the active form used by the body. Thyroid hormone production is regulated by thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), made by the pituitary gland. The pituitary gland, which is located in the brain, is the "master gland" of the Endocrine system. When the thyroid is not functioning well, you may experience symptoms such as depression, constipation, hypersensitivity to cold, numbness, muscle cramps, chronic digestive issues, dry hair and skin and weight gain. These are some of the symptoms of hypothyroidism. When the thyroid gland is putting out too much thyroid hormone, this is hyperthyroid and the symptoms include heart palpitations, increased pulse, nervousness, insomnia, night sweats and difficulty gaining weight. The most common cause of hypothyroidism in the United States is Hashimoto's disease. Hashimoto's is an autoimmune disease whereby the body attacks and destroys the thyroid gland.

The typical test for thyroid function is TSH. When TSH is high it indicates that the thyroid is not producing enough thyroid hormone. A high TSH begins the search for the cause of low thyroid function. The next step is to see if there is an autoimmune process occurring. The symptoms of Hashimoto's may resemble a roller coaster whereby the individual is fatigued, depressed, constipated, has low libido and the next week feels anxious and cannot sleep. The TSH levels of this individual may also fluctuate and she is constantly having her thyroid medication adjusted. Hashimoto's disease is the immune system attacking the

thyroid. Hormones in the gland flow into the blood stream, metabolism speeds up and the individual looks like she is hyperthyroid. Over time there is a loss of function of the thyroid and the individual is tired, cold, gains weight and is presenting with hypothyroid symptoms. I recommend that anyone who has hypothyroid symptoms have their antibodies checked. The most important test for Hashimoto's is thyroid peroxidase antibodies (TPO Ab). Additionally, I typically do a thyroid panel and at times free T3 as it is the best marker to see the amount of active thyroid available.

Why does it matter that we know the cause of Hypothyroidism? When the underlying cause is Hashimoto's, it is essential to calm down and balance the immune system. In Hashimoto's one side of the immune system is dominant. A T-Helper cell (TH-1) dominant person has too many natural killer and cytotoxic T-cells. A TH-2 dominant person has too many B cells, the part of the immune system that puts information into memory. Dominance can be measured via cytokines through an immune panel. There is significant evidence that there is a link between gluten intolerance and Hashimoto's. The gluten molecule is similar to the thyroid gland molecule, which may negatively affect an overactive immune system in a gluten intolerant individual. Thus, if you have Hashimoto's then it is recommended that you be tested for gluten intolerance and avoid gluten products. Additional treatment for Hashimoto's includes vitamin D which is an immune modulator and needs to be given in therapeutic doses. Other nutrients that modulate the immune system include glutathione, superoxide dismutase and probiotics. Dr. Datis Kharrazian has researched herbs that affect the Th-1 and Th-2 pathways. (1) Once treated the immune system comes back into balance. Since many practitioners use thyroid supplements containing iodine to treat hypothyroid, it is essential

to determine if the cause is Hashimoto's. Iodine dramatically worsens Hashimoto's by increasing TPO and hence TPO antibodies.

What triggers Hashimoto's? An active or chronic infection, such as viruses or environmental toxins, insulin resistance, gluten intolerance, estrogen fluctuations, vitamin D deficiency, iodine excess may provoke an autoimmune response. It is not uncommon for perimenopausal and postpartum women to be diagnosed with Hashimoto's.

While there are many causes of hypothyroid, I want to mention the relationship of the adrenals to the thyroid. As a naturopathic doctor, I have learned that if you treat the thyroid, you also need to treat the adrenals. Adrenal stress affects the conversion

of T4 into the active form of T3, which is the thyroid hormone the body can use. Chronic stress weakens the immune system, which can exacerbate or trigger Hashimoto's. When the adrenals are continually releasing cortisol, the pituitary gland may become sluggish and lead to low progesterone in women. Chronic elevated cortisol affects the liver and consequently its ability to metabolize estrogen. This contributes to an estrogen dominant situation, thus further intensifying hormone imbalances in perimenopause. While the adrenals can be treated, it is essential to identify and address the cause of the chronic stress. This includes removing some adrenal stressors, alcohol, nicotine, caffeinated drinks, allergenic foods and inadequate sleep.

Remember, just as the body is an interconnected matrix, so too is the relationship of mind to body. The body is an expression of the mind. What we put into our bodies and how the body is treated affects the functioning of our minds.

(1) Kharrazian, Datis, DHSc, DC, Why Do I Still Have Thyroid Symptoms? 2010.

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## Spiritual Hunger: Our Quest for Sacredness and Connection

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participation in drumming circles, the recital of chants or observance of silence, breaking or burning objects, wearing symbolic clothing or jewelry, or use of one's special soul name. Rituals enhance creativity, provide structure and stability, and help us acknowledge and appreciate each moment of our existence including our daily routines. With ritual practice, our hearts open, our minds expand and we are invited into a state of significance and bliss.

Ceremonies are events, the larger frame or context within which various rituals are enacted. As events, ceremonies honor entrances such as births and marriage, exits such as death and divorce, and rites of

passage such as significant birthdays, leaving home, beginning or ending a job, and moving from one community to another. Ceremonies generally include a group of people and therefore give us an opportunity to have others witness, acknowledge and support these entrances, exits or transitions.

Sacramental acts bring us to a slower pulse, a more syncopated rhythm that moves us from daily habit consciousness to the doorway of the extraordinary. Through this open doorway to the extraordinary, we participate in an ever-expanding flow of opportunity to not only be profoundly aware of the sacred vibration of everything around us, but also to co-creatively participate in the design of

our lives. Sacramental acts also provide us a splendid opportunity to step out of the world of time and move into mystical time where we become more aligned with the cosmic pulse of existence. Infused with glory and impelled to evolve, we become conduits through which alchemical forces can move and have expression, and these forces endow our lives with depth, renewal, significance and fulfillment

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