

Why women have hypothyroidism a lot more often than men

It is a well-known fact that hypothyroidism (low thyroid) is predominantly a disease of older women. Of course, hypothyroidism can happen at any age, even in young girls and boys. But for every man with hypothyroidism there are 8-9 women who have this problem. The question is why? And the answer is – we don't know for sure.

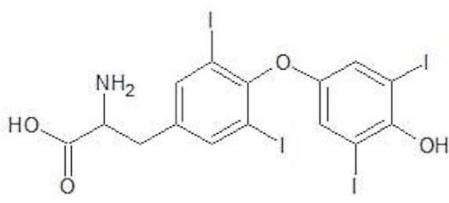
Several theories have been proposed.

One is that it has something to do with female sex hormones: estrogen and progesterone. They are both necessary for normal production of the thyroid hormones and for making them active. As women get older, their sex hormones change, the levels become lower and it may affect the thyroid gland and decrease the production of active thyroid hormone, which is called T3. This can lead to hypothyroidism. This is thought to be the reason why many pregnant women develop thyroid problems.

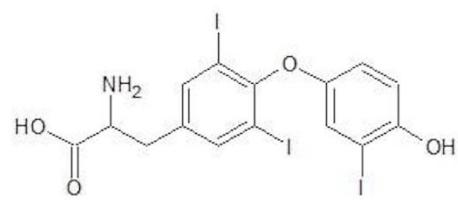
Another theory has to do with genetics. There is a definite genetic component to hypothyroidism. Women who have relatives with low thyroid are much more likely to become hypothyroid themselves. It has also been suggested that female genetic makeup somehow may predispose them to hypothyroidism.

The most interesting theory, in my opinion, has to do with a mineral called Iodine. Thyroid gland produces several hormones, the most important of which are T4 (thyroxine) and T3 (triiodothyronine). Both contain two amino acids (building blocks of protein) called L-tyrosine. They also have 4 iodines in case of T4, 3 iodines in T3. In other words, you cannot make thyroid hormones without iodine, just like you cannot make hemoglobin in red cells without iron.

Thyroid Hormones



Thyroxine (T4)



Triiodothyronine (T3)

This is a chemical formula of thyroid hormones. O is oxygen, H is hydrogen, N is nitrogen, I is iodine. There are four iodines in T4, three in T3.

Iodine is mostly found in the ocean, so fish, seaweed and other edible sea creatures contain iodine. However, there is not much iodine in the soil. The result is that many people are deficient in iodine. In fact, some areas of US have so little iodine that many people living there

used to develop goiter, a condition when the thyroid gland becomes enlarged and appears as a big lump on the neck. They used to call those areas “goiter belts.”

This is the reason why sometime in the 1920s the US government has decided to add Iodine to salt, to prevent Iodine deficiency. That's why we have iodized salt.

Iodine is an important mineral, it is not only essential for thyroid hormone production. Most other organs need Iodine, for instance glands that make saliva (salivary glands), stomach to produce acid, ovaries that make female hormones, lungs, heart, prostate gland and pretty much all the organs need a little bit of Iodine.

It turns out that mammary glands (breasts) need quite a bit of iodine for normal growth and development. As a girl goes through puberty, her breasts start growing and they consume whatever iodine they can get, competing with the thyroid gland for this important mineral. In fact, they (the breasts) need so much iodine that they do not always get as much as they need. This may lead to a condition called fibrocystic breast disease, where breasts have lumps that can be painful. This condition is quite common in women in the US. Lack of iodine may also have some connection to breast cancer.

So, in essence, what happens to many American women, when their breasts start developing, they “steal” iodine from the thyroid gland, which leads to decreased production of the thyroid hormones, which leads to hypothyroidism. Not only that, but it also increases the risk of fibrocystic breast disease and even breast cancer. This theory makes a lot of sense, especially because I find that pretty much all my hypothyroid patients are deficient in iodine.

US has the highest incidence of hypothyroidism in the world. Which countries have the lowest incidence? Japan and Iceland, where they consume a lot more seafood and seaweed. They also have much lower incidence of fibrocystic breasts and breast cancer. The incidence of breast cancer in US women is more than 3 times higher than in Japanese women. Scientists explain it by the fact that Japanese women get a lot more iodine in their diet.

There is an easy way to check whether you have iodine deficiency. All you need is a topical iodine solution, sold in pharmacies under the names Povidone, Betadine, and others. It's a brown liquid that is applied to wounds, scrapes, and other skin injuries as an antiseptic. This solution kills bacteria and fights infection.

Take a cotton ball and soak it with the solution of iodine. Then use this cotton ball to paint a circle about the size of a tennis ball anywhere on your skin – abdomen, chest, thigh, forearm - you choose the spot.

The location does not matter, because all you want to know is how long this iodine on your skin will last. If you have enough iodine in your body, this painted circle of iodine will stay on your skin for at least 24 hours, sometimes 2-3 days. But if you are deficient, your body will literally “suck it in” and it will disappear within hours, maybe less.

If you are deficient, you will need supplements of iodine. They have all kinds of iodine supplements, liquids, pills, creams, etc. Some supplements are only available by prescription. If you are low in iodine and need to take a supplement, I prefer that you do it under a doctor's supervision. Because if you take too much iodine that's also not good, because it can actually suppress your thyroid.

The bottom line is that many hypothyroid women are low in iodine and they would benefit from iodine supplements. Especially if they also have fibrocystic breast disease.

If you think you have hypothyroidism, if you have the symptoms, and your doctor refuses to treat you because your blood tests are "normal," or if you are being treated with Synthroid and still do not feel well, just give me a call.

I have treated literally thousands of patients with hypothyroidism, and I think I can help you become healthy, energetic, vibrant and vigorous, as you deserve to be.

My number is 718-769-0997.

Also, if you or someone you know, have fibrocystic breast disease please sign up for my comprehensive thyroid seminar and learn how to help it. There is a method that is very simple and often very effective that can get rid you or your friend(s) of lumpy and painful breasts.

Michael Teplisky MD

[Call for a free 15 min consultation](#)

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