



Thyroid Problems

Herbs and Supplements for Thyroid Imbalance

The thyroid is a very important endocrine gland. Located at the base of the neck, it secretes two hormones which help regulate the body's metabolic rate—thyroxin (T4) and tri-iodothyronine (T3). T4 and T3 are released in about a 4:1 ratio (4 times more T4 than T3). T3 is the more active form. T4 is converted to T3 in peripheral tissues, particularly the liver, so liver malfunction can affect thyroid function. The enzyme required for this conversion needs selenium—a mineral deficient in many diets.

Problems with the thyroid gland are extremely common. It has been estimated that as many as one and a half billion people in the world are at risk for thyroid problems. Hypothyroid (low thyroid function) is the most common thyroid malfunction, but it is also possible to have a hyperactive thyroid gland. We'll address both in this handout.

Hypothyroid

When the thyroid function is low, the metabolic rate diminishes. Symptoms of low thyroid include dry skin, fatigue, loss of sexual desire, lowered body temperature, and weight gain.

Lack of iodine is one cause of poor thyroid function, since iodine is critical for the gland's activity. Iodine is a very rare nutrient in land plants but is common in fish and sea vegetables like kelp, dulse, bladderwrack, and Iris moss.

Adding foods rich in natural iodine to the diet will often improve thyroid function. Kelp, in particular, is very beneficial for the thyroid because it contains di-iodotyrosine. Two molecules of this substance are attached by the thyroid peroxidase enzyme in the thyroid to form T4. So, kelp contains a precursor to the thyroid hormone, making synthesis of thyroxine easier.

Sea vegetables, like kelp, can be sprinkled on food or added to soups, stews, etc. They add a pleasant salty taste to foods. Two formulas are available which contain these sea vegetables and are designed to feed the thyroid gland and aid its function. They are TS II and Thyroid Activator. These formulas can be very helpful in cases of moderately low thyroid.

Lack of iodine is not the only cause of low thyroid. Halogens (fluoride, chlorine, and bromide) are all highly reactive and disrupt iodine in the body. All are additives to municipal water supplies. Corticosteroids depress the thyroid. Aspirin (salicylates) and anticoagulants can also depress thyroid activity. It is wise for anyone with a low thyroid condition to avoid these chemicals.

Deficiencies of other nutrients, such as copper, zinc, manganese, and l-tyrosine can also result in low thyroid. Thyroid Support contains these and other nutrients necessary for thyroid function along with kelp, and thyroid, pituitary and hypothala-

mus glandular substances from New Zealand. The glandulars help to rebuild glandular tissue, while the nutrients and herbs improve glandular function, making Thyroid Support useful for severe cases of low thyroid.

Weaning off of thyroid medication is possible for people whose thyroid gland has not been destroyed or removed. Thyroid medications should not be eliminated or reduced without monitoring the situation with a physician. A person can take kelp (6-10 capsules per day) or a thyroid formulas for about a week, then reduce their thyroid medication in half while continuing to take the herbs. Wait one to four weeks and lower by half the dose of thyroid medication while maintaining supplement intake. If low thyroid symptoms reappear go back to the higher dose. After reducing the dose to 1/8 or 1/16 of the original dose, you can also try skipping days. The goal is to find the minimum amount of thyroid medication required to maintain health, or to eliminate the thyroid medication entirely. Again, this should never be attempted by persons whose thyroid gland has been totally destroyed or removed.

Hyperthyroid

An overactive thyroid gland is also possible. The most common cause of hyperactive thyroid is Grave's disease, an autoimmune disorder. Symptoms of hyperthyroid function include bulging eyes, rapid heart rate, weight loss, anxiety, and sleep disturbances. This is a serious condition requiring medical attention. Unfortunately, medical therapy is usually less than desirable. Radioactive iodine 131 is typically used to "fry" the thyroid gland of an overactive patient.

There are natural ways of reducing overactive thyroid function. Diets high in carbohydrates and low in fat or protein tend to overstimulate the thyroid. Cruciferous vegetables have a mild inhibitory effect. A stronger inhibiting effect can be found in lemon balm and bugle weed. Rapid heart rate can be calmed by using motherwort. IF-C can be used to reduce inflammation which may be causing hyperactive thyroid function, while adaptagens (such as eleuthero root or Suma Combination) can be used to support the adrenals easing stress and anxiety.

Natural therapy for an overactive thyroid condition should be only be done under the care of a qualified health professional and monitored by a physician for effectiveness. You may also consult some of the references below for additional information.

Selected References

Professional Guide to Conditions, Herbs and Supplements by IntegrativeMedicine
Botanicals for Thyroid Function and Dysfunction by Ryan Drum, Medicines from the Earth: Official Proceedings, 2000.

For Educational Purposes Only

Seek appropriate professional assistance for all serious health problems. Handout prepared by Tree of Light Publishing
P.O. Box 911239, St. George, UT 84791 (www.treelite.com)
©2004 May be reproduced provided it is not altered in any way.

Distributed by: