Nutrients that support our thyroid

The thyroid gland needs specific vitamins and minerals to properly do its job. Since we are all unique in how our hormones are functioning, the best way to get a handle on what our body specifically needs is to have a full thyroid panel done to help pinpoint where individual levels may be off balance. Research shows us that there are a few key nutrients that are highly valuable for everyone.

**Iodine (I):** This is the most important trace element found in thyroid functioning. Without iodine, our thyroid does not have the basic building blocks it needs to make the necessary hormones to support all of the tissues in the body. Thyroxine (T4) and Triiodothyronine (T3) are the most essential, active, iodine-containing hormones we have. In 2012, a CDC report showed that women of childbearing years in the United States, ages 20-39, had the lowest iodine levels of any other age group. This is something we can easily improve by eating more iodine-rich foods.

**Selenium (Se):** This element is indispensable to our thyroid in several ways. Selenium-containing enzymes protect the thyroid gland when we are under stress, working like a “detox,” to help flush oxidative and chemical stress, and even social stress—which can cause reactions in our body. Selenium-based proteins help regulate hormone synthesis, converting T4 into the more accessible T3. These proteins and enzymes help regulate metabolism and also help maintain the right amount of thyroid hormones in the tissues and blood, as well as organs such as the liver, kidneys, and even the brain. Selenium also helps regulate and recycle our iodine stores. These are all very important functions!

**Zinc (Zn), iron (Fe), and copper (Cu):** These three trace metals are vital to thyroid function. Low levels of zinc can cause T4, T3, and the thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) to also become low. Research shows that both hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroids) and hypothyroidism (under active thyroids), can sometimes create a zinc deficiency leading to lowered thyroid hormones.

Decreased levels of iron can result in decreased thyroid function as well. When combined with an iodine deficiency, iron must be replaced to repair the thyroid imbalance. Copper is needed to help produce TSH, and maintain T4 production. T4 helps cholesterol regulation, and some research even indicates copper deficiency may contribute to higher cholesterol and heart issues for people with hypothyroidism.

**Antioxidants and B vitamins:** Most people have heard that antioxidants are important to help temper oxidative stress, and thus combat degenerative diseases as well as improve the aging process. Vitamin A (commonly known as beta-carotene), C, and E, along with iodine and selenium, help the thyroid gland mitigate oxidative stress in an ongoing, daily process.

Oxidative stress tends to be higher with Graves disease, the most common form of hyperthyroidism. With this condition, the overactive thyroid uses more oxygen, which can result in an accumulation of oxygenated compounds that can damage cells. Antioxidants are recommended to help stop the oxidative stress before it dominoes. In addition, the B vitamins, including B2, B3, and B6, help with the manufacturing of T4. As you can see, these mechanisms are all connected, which is why the proper micronutrients are important!

**Foods that support our thyroid**

The following list offers whole food sources containing the necessary vitamins and minerals needed to help our thyroid stay healthy and work properly.
Iodine

Primary sources:

- Sea vegetables: Kelp, nori, kombu, dulse, arame, wakame, hijiki
- Seafood: Haddock, clams, salmon, shrimp, oysters, sardines
- Iodized sea salt

Secondary sources:

- Eggs, spinach, garlic, asparagus, Swiss chard, mushrooms, summer squash, sesame seeds, lima beans

Selenium

Tuna, mushrooms, beef, sunflower seeds, Brazil nuts, organ meats, halibut, soybeans

Zinc

Beef, turkey, lamb, fresh oysters, sardines, soybeans, walnuts, sunflower seeds, Brazil nuts, pecans, almonds, split peas, ginger root, whole grains, maple syrup

Copper

Crabmeat, oysters, lobster, beef, nuts, sunflower seeds, beans (white beans, chickpeas, soybeans), shiitake mushrooms, pearled barley, tomato paste, dark chocolate

Iron

Organ meats, oysters, clams, spinach, lentils, soybeans, white beans, pumpkin seeds, blackstrap molasses

Vitamin A (beta-carotene)

- Broccoli, asparagus, lettuce, kale, carrots, spinach, sweet potatoes, liver, winter squash/pumpkin, cantaloupe

Vitamin C

- Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, greens (mustard, collard, kale, turnip), parsley, peppers (chili, Bell, sweet), strawberries, guava, papaya, citrus, kiwifruit

Vitamin E

- Peanuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, beans and soybeans, asparagus, leafy green vegetables, whole grains, liver

Vitamin B2 (riboflavin)

- Egg yolks, organ meats, wild rice, wheat germ, Brewer’s yeast, mushrooms, almonds

Vitamin B3 (niacin)

- Poultry (white meat), peanuts (with skin), wheat bran, rice bran, liver, Brewer’s yeast

Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine)

- Fish (tuna, trout, salmon), liver, bananas, brown rice, wheat germ, sunflower seeds, walnuts, beans (navy beans, garbanzos, pinto beans, soybeans, lima beans), Brewer’s yeast
Foods that may disrupt our thyroid function

**Soy:** There are some studies showing that the isoflavones in soybeans can inhibit the enzyme which adds iodine to the thyroid hormone known as thyroid peroxidase (TPO). These studies indicate that soy isoflavone might bond with the iodine we do have, diminishing the reserve for thyroid production. The issue lies with the levels of iodine we have. If levels are sufficient, eating natural soy should not be a problem. Natural soy is a tremendous help to many women in regulating menopause symptoms, so this is an important nutrient to consider.

**Brassica family of vegetables:** This group of vegetables includes brussel sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage, which studies show can reduce the thyroid hormone in a similar way to soy. Goiter, an enlarged thyroid, is linked to iodine deficiency. The compounds categorized as *goitrogens* can be found in small amounts in many other foods as well, including spinach, peanuts, and strawberries. It’s ok to eat them, but by pairing them with iodine-rich foods, we can counteract the metabolization reducing iodine.

**Gluten:** There is a distinct connection between gluten intolerance, celiac disease, and autoimmune thyroid issues. This is the one food I strongly recommend to avoid if you have a thyroid condition. Gluten is found in many foods, and can trigger a whole series of digestive issues and hormonal imbalances. I have many patients whose thyroid functioning improves if we determine a gluten sensitivity and remove gluten from their diets. Not only that, they feel better!

**Find the right balance**

When we support our thyroid naturally, we can improve the way we feel on many levels. It may seem complicated, but once we learn which foods help and how to support our thyroid with the micronutrients we need, it will become second-nature.

- **Get tested.** Have a full thyroid panel, as well as check iodine, selenium, and *Vitamin D* levels. The results of these tests combined, can help determine any underlying conditions and the best way to treat them.

- **Eat whole foods and consider taking supplements.** Supporting our thyroid through consuming wholesome foods rich in the right micronutrients is ideal. But it isn’t always possible to do this on a regular basis. Using a high-quality multivitamin ([click here](#)) for Women to Women’s formulation) and mineral supplement can help round-out deficiencies in thyroid imbalance. Try this approach before taking a synthetic thyroid hormone, since these prescriptions tend to increase our thyroid’s dependence on them, making it harder to get off of them later.

- **Use herbs.** There are many herbs that can support thyroid function, such as sage, ashwaganda, bacopa monnieri, and *coleus forskohlii*. Combined with iodine and selenium, these herbs can help boost energy and support healthy metabolism. A functional medicine practitioner can help with the formula based on individual need.

- **Address stress.** Chronic stress leads to elevated levels of *cortisol*, the primary stress hormone, which over time can overwork thyroid hormones, eventually leading to hypothyroidism. A good way to minimize physical stress is to actually eat more often. Three balanced meals and two healthy snacks every day can keep our thyroid working smoothly. Minimizing emotional stress
is also important. Exercise, plenty of sleep, and relaxation techniques such as yoga and meditation can also help balance our hormones and thyroid functioning.

- **Sit and enjoy your meals.** We live in a culture where relaxing is put at the bottom of our to-do list. When we are rushed and hurry to eat, or eat standing at the kitchen counter, in the car, or at our desks, our digestive systems do not work as well as they do when we are relaxed and comfortable while eating. Sitting down and enjoying our meals not only helps nourish our bodies, it helps our thyroid by reducing the stress associated with hurrying. Sit with friends and family, talk, laugh, relax, and enjoy the break. You will notice a difference in how you feel, and your thyroid will too.