13 Ways to Treat Hypothyroidism Naturally

Your thyroid, a butterfly-shaped gland in your neck below your Adam’s apple, is your chief gland of energy and metabolism and is like a master lever that fires up the genes that keep cells doing their jobs. You can think of the thyroid as a fundamental mechanism in a complex machine, as every cell in your body has thyroid hormone receptors.

Hypothyroidism, or low thyroid function, is a silent epidemic, according to many functional medicine doctors. People can suffer for years with symptoms that our conventional medical system frequently doesn’t know how to treat because complaints seem scattered or vague and often there is no pill for the ill(s).

What’s worse, in most cases, hypothyroidism isn’t rooted in a thyroid problem in the first place. It’s rooted in an immune system gone awry, but most doctors don’t test for the antibodies that show the presence of autoimmunity.

According to Dr. Datis Kharrazian, 90% of people with hypothyroidism have Hashimoto’s, an autoimmune hypothyroid condition, whereby the immune system attacks thyroid tissue. Therefore, to cure thyroid disease, or any autoimmune condition, you have to get to the source of the imbalance; focusing on suppression of symptoms with medication is simply barking up the wrong tree.

Your Dietary Defense

Making dietary changes is your first line of defense in treating hypothyroidism. Many people with hypothyroidism experience crippling fatigue and brain fog, which prompts reaching for non-nutritional forms of energy like sugar and caffeine. I’ve dubbed these rascals the terrible twosome, as they can burn out your thyroid (and destabilize blood sugar).

1. **Just say no to the dietary bungee cord.** Greatly reduce or eliminate caffeine and sugar, including refined carbohydrates like flour, which the body treats like sugar. Make grain-based carbohydrates lesser of a focus, eating non-starchy vegetables to your heart’s content.

2. **Up the protein.** Protein transports thyroid hormone to all your tissues and enjoying it at each meal can help normalize thyroid function. Proteins include nuts and nut butters; quinoa; hormone- and antibiotic-free animal products (organic, grass-fed meats, eggs, and sustainably-farmed fish); and legumes.

   Note: I’m not a fan of soy and soy products: tofu, soy milk, fake meats, energy bars, etc. Even when organic and non-GMO, soy can impede cell receptors and disrupt the feedback loop throughout your entire endocrine (hormonal) system.

3. **Get fat.** Fat is your friend and cholesterol is the precursor to hormonal pathways; if you’re getting insufficient fat and cholesterol, you could be exacerbating hormonal imbalance, which includes thyroid hormones. Natural, healthful fats include olive oil; ghee; avocados; flax seeds; fish; nuts and nut butters; hormone- and antibiotic-free full fat cheese, yogurt, and cottage cheese (yes, full fat, not skim); and coconut milk products.

4. **Nutrient-up.** While nutritional deficiencies may not be the cause of hypothyroidism, not having enough of these micronutrients and minerals can aggravate symptoms: vitamin D, iron, omega-3 fatty acids, selenium, zinc, copper, vitamin A, the B vitamins, and iodine.

A few highlights:
• It’s commonly believed that hypothyroidism is due to insufficient iodine, but this isn’t true. Dr. Kharrazian states that if you have Hashimoto’s, taking supplemental iodine is like throwing gasoline on a fire, so eschew iodine supplements and iodized salt. Primary sources of iodine: sea vegetables and seafood. Secondary sources: eggs, asparagus, lima beans, mushrooms, spinach, sesame seeds, summer squash, Swiss chard, and garlic.
• Optimal vitamin D levels are between 50-80 ng/mL; anything below 32 contributes to hormone pathway disruption.
• Omega-3s, found in fish, grassfed animal products, flaxseeds, and walnuts, are the building blocks for hormones that control immune function and cell growth, are critical to thyroid function, and improve the ability to respond to thyroid hormones.

5. **Go 100% gluten-free.** The molecular composition of thyroid tissue is almost identical to that of gluten. So for those with Hashimoto’s, it’s a case of mistaken identity. Eating gluten can increase the autoimmune attack on your thyroid.

6. **Be mindful of goitrogens,** which are foods that can interfere with thyroid function. Goitrogens include broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, rutabaga, turnips, millet, spinach, strawberries, peaches, watercress, peanuts, radishes, and soybeans. Does it mean that you can never eat these foods? No, because cooking inactivates goitrogenic compounds and eating radishes and watercress in moderation isn’t going to be a deal-breaker.

7. **Go for the glutathione.** Glutathione is a powerful antioxidant that strengthens the immune system and is one of the pillars of fighting Hashimoto’s. It can boost your body’s ability to modulate and regulate the immune system, dampen autoimmune flare-ups, and protect and heal thyroid tissue.

While few foods contain glutathione, there are foods that help the body produce glutathione: asparagus, broccoli, peaches, avocado, spinach, garlic, squash, grapefruit, and raw eggs. A plant substance found in broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage, (those goitrogens), helps replenish glutathione stores.

8. **Address underlying food sensitivities.** Just like the body’s attack on the thyroid in the presence of Hashimoto’s, the body will also see offending or inflammatory foods as an invader and will up the ante on the autoimmune response.

9. **Do a gut check.** A whopping 20 percent of thyroid function depends on a sufficient supply of healthy gut bacteria, so it’s best to supplement with probiotics (friendly intestinal bacteria).

10. **Address silent inflammation with whole foods nutrition.** Systemic inflammation and autoimmunity often go hand-in-hand.

11. **Address adrenal fatigue.** There is an intimate connection between your thyroid and adrenal glands and it’s uncommon to have hypothyroidism without some level of adrenal fatigue. The thyroid and adrenals are like Frick and Frack – so tightly in cahoots that it’s not effective to address one without the other.

12. **Look at your stressors and practice relaxation.** The thyroid is a very sensitive gland and is exceptionally reactive to the stress response.

13. **Ask for the thyroid collar.** The thyroid is sensitive to radiation, so next time you’re getting an x-ray at the dentist, ask for the thyroid collar. Do not let your thyroid get zapped!