

Is Your Thyroid In Balance?

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An important clue to your overall health might be just to look in the mirror. Thyroid dysfunction is a common health issue. The thyroid gland is a small, butterfly-shaped gland located at the base of your neck just below your Adam's apple. Your thyroid gland helps control the function of many of your body's most important organs, including your heart, brain, liver, kidneys, and skin. Making sure that your thyroid gland is healthy and functioning properly is important to your body's overall well-being. About 27 million Americans have thyroid disease making it more common than diabetes or heart disease.

Hypothyroidism is when the thyroid gland is not producing enough thyroid hormone causing your body's systems to slow down. **Hyperthyroidism** is when the thyroid gland produces too much thyroid hormone causing your body's systems to speed up. Untreated thyroid disease may lead to elevated cholesterol levels, heart disease, infertility, and osteoporosis. Recent research has suggested a strong genetic link between thyroid disease and other autoimmune diseases including types of diabetes, arthritis, and anemia.

Frequently seen symptoms of **Hypothyroidism** includes: Fatigue, Unexplained Weight Gain, Dry Skin and Hair, Difficulty Concentrating, Increased Cholesterol, Depression, Always Feeling Cold, Vague Aches and Pains, and Heavy Menstrual Flow. Frequently seen symptoms of **Hyperthyroidism** includes: Nervousness/Irritability, Irregular Heart Beat, Heat Intolerance, Increased Sweating, Unexplained Weight Loss, Diarrhea, Sleeplessness, Thyroid Enlargement, Decreased Menstrual Flow, and Impaired Fertility.

People who are at increased risk for thyroid dysfunction include: Previous Thyroid Dysfunction, Goiter, Surgery or Radiotherapy Affecting the Thyroid Gland, Diabetes Mellitus, Pernicious Anemia, Coarse or Thinning Hair, Use of Medicines such as Lithium Carbonate or Iodine-containing Compounds, History of Head or Neck Irradiations, Family History of Thyroid Disease.

There is an easy way for you to check for signs of thyroid enlargement that is often called the "Thyroid Neck Check". Hold a small mirror in your hand, focusing on the area of your neck just below the Adam's apple and immediately above the collarbone. Your thyroid gland is located in this area of your neck. While focusing on this area in the mirror, tip your head back. Take a drink of water and swallow. As you swallow, look at your neck. Check for any bulges or protrusions in this area when you swallow. Remember don't confuse the Adam's apple with the thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is located further down on your neck, closer to the collarbone. You may want to repeat this process several times. If you do see any bulges or protrusions in this area, see your physician. You may have an enlarged thyroid gland or a thyroid nodule and should be checked.

Your physician can easily check your thyroid function by performing a simple blood test. If your blood results indicate an abnormal functioning thyroid, additional testing or medication might be in order. So remember, if you have any of the symptoms listed above it would be a good idea to see your physician.