Hyperthyroidism

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Overactive Thyroid

Overactive thyroid, more commonly known as Hyperthyroidism, has symptoms which can mimic other diseases or conditions, making it difficult for some doctors to immediately diagnose. At Mullen Natural Health Centre, our practitioners focus on finding and successfully treating the cause not just the symptoms.

What is Hypothyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland begins to produce too much thyroid hormone (called thyroxine.) This can lead to a faster metabolism which sees sufferers losing weight quickly, experiencing feelings of anxiety or nervousness, and other related symptoms. Women are more likely to suffer from hyperthyroidism than men and as many as 1 in 50 women in Australia will experience overactive thyroid issues. The most common cause of hyperthyroidism is the autoimmune disease known as Graves' disease with risk of onset highest between 20-40 years of age. Other risk factors for developing overactive thyroid include stress (including pregnancy), intestinal dysbiosis and overuse of antibiotics.

Symptoms

Many people report no signs early on as it can develop slowly; however, if you experience the following symptoms, you could be suffering from hyperthyroidism:

- Weight loss (even with increased appetite)
- Swelling at the base of the neck (where the thyroid gland is located)
- Excessive sweating and/or intolerance to heat
- Anxiety/nervousness
- Poor sleep
- Muscle weakness
- Tremors/shaking
- Increased heart rate and/or palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Diarrhoea or increase in bowel movements
- Infertility (female) or infrequent menstruation
- Swollen, red and/or bulging eyes
- Double vision or sensitivity to light
- Constant staring/infrequent blinking
- Raised, thickened skin over the shins, tops of feet, back, hands or face

Causes / Triggers

There are many things that may cause and/or trigger hyperthyroidism:

Family history

There are genetic factors associated with the development of hyperthyroidism in some people, though

certain groups of people are more susceptible than others. Especially susceptible are newborns born to mothers with Graves' disease. Thyroid issues can also skip generations and, whilst some are greatly affected by the inherited tendency, others never develop symptoms.

Autoimmune trigger

A personal history of autoimmune problems can increase your risk of developing hyperthyroidism. Graves' disease is a condition in which antibodies stimulate the thyroid to produce extra thyroxine. 90% of those experiencing hyperthyroidism are diagnosed with Graves', making it the most common cause of overactive thyroid. This autoimmune disease can be caused by a combination of factors including both genetic and environmental influences.

- Graves' Disease: This autoimmune condition appears as a goitre in the neck along with eye and skin changes. It stems from an antibody that stimulates the thyroid to produce excessive amounts of thyroid hormones. In the process, the antibody overwhelms the usual thyroid-stimulating hormone. The stimulation causes the thyroid to swell or grow, creating a goitre.

- Toxic Nodular Goitre: One or more nodules (benign tumours) in the thyroid produce an excess of thyroid hormone. Hyperthyroidism is also sometimes triggered by individual nodules within the gland sealing off and inexplicably beginning to produce too much thyroid hormone.

- Secondary Hyperthyroidism: In this condition the pituitary gland stimulates the thyroid to overproduce thyroid hormones.

The thyroid gland is very susceptible to toxicity, especially heavy metals. It is important to reduce exposure to heavy metal toxicity, plus endogenous and exogenous antigenic material.

Health triggers

A body under prolonged stress can develop thyroiditis. Health or stress triggers can include trauma to the thyroid itself, pregnancy, medical treatments for other conditions (e.g., overuse of antibiotics, iodine supplementation), toxicity due to smoking, or even high stress life events (such as death of a family member, divorce, job loss, etc.)

Dietary triggers

Whilst the body is usually able to balance the blood levels of acid and alkaline, a prolonged disruption of the pH balance (acid stress) can lead to problems. Nutritional imbalances with iodine, tyrosine, zinc, selenium, vitamin D or iron can also trigger thyroid issues. If you are suffering from an overactive thyroid, avoid iodine in supplements, seafoods and kelp, as this may contribute to increasing thyroxine output.

- Caeliac Disease – this is an autoimmune response to the consumption of gluten with some symptoms that mirror those of hyperthyroidism. This disease can often increase the likelihood of a person having Graves' disease (the autoimmune cause of hyperthyroidism) and vice versa.

- Gluten and/or dairy (casein) intolerance – as with Caeliac Disease, general gluten intolerance can trigger hyperthyroidism. Interestingly, those who are intolerant to gluten are often casein (the protein in dairy foods) intolerant as well. For those intolerant to gluten and/or casein, when they ingest foods with these proteins, their system becomes inflamed, leading to leaky gut (see below).

Emotional triggers

Those who suffer from thyroid issues may find that their internal mental and emotional messages mirror or trigger their physical experience. Those with hyperthyroidism can often feel as if they are always rushing, trying to fit everything into the day possible and guilt for not doing 'enough'. This stress and constant juggling can lead to feeling as if all the balls will fall if they don't get it all done. Whilst taking care of everything for everyone else at the expense of themselves, they may even feel anger if they are not able to 'do it all'.

Leaky Gut

Leaky gut syndrome occurs when the intestinal lining becomes inflamed, causing it to be permeable or 'leaky'. The inflamed lining allows unwanted substances (like tiny food particles, bacterial waste products and toxins) into the bloodstream which would normally be eliminated from the body. This puts unnecessary stress on the liver, lymphatic system and immune system, as these organs must work to clear the body of the excess toxins. This stress causes inflammation which can adversely affect autoimmune conditions such as Graves' disease , thereby becoming a trigger for this and other conditions.

Leaky gut syndrome has far reaching effects on a person's health and can contribute to or cause thyroid issues as well as other health problems such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), food allergies, celiac disease, dysbiosis (flora imbalance in the gut), asthma, pancreatic insufficiency, chronic joint and muscle pain, and skin rashes like eczema. It has also been linked to autism, ADD and ADHD.

Liver stress

In Naturopathic terms we also associate liver stress with contributing to/triggering thyroid issues in sensitive individuals. Liver stress can be caused by leaky gut, toxin overload, etc. Other symptoms of liver stress include mood swings (anger, depression, anxiety), tiredness or fatigue, hormonal imbalance, headaches, dizziness, weight gain, thyroid problems, muscle aches/pains, blood sugars highs and lows, high cholesterol and triglycerides, skin disorders, increased chemical sensitivity and sighing.

Naturopathic Approach to Treatment

Our approach at Mullen Natural Heath is to find and treat your individual causes and triggers, then to help manage and regulate your thyroid function, ultimately, to help rebalance your immune system.

Four Filters (Digestive, Liver, Immune and Kidney)

Good health can be achieved in your body because of the four filters that work to keep your systems in balance. The Digestive filter, Liver filter, Immune filter and Kidney filter work in conjunction to keep your health at optimum levels; however, when one or more are overloaded with toxins or stress, your body's balance shifts which can cause a number of negative symptoms or diseases. With testing, a plan can be created to help eliminate toxins and restore balance so that you can enjoy greater health, both physically and emotionally.

Medical Testing

There are several pathology tests that may be undertaken to identify thyroid issues such as Thyroid Function Tests (TFTs) which will check for Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) levels, Free T4 (thyroxine) levels, Free T3 (activated thyroid hormone), and Anti-thyroid Microsomal Antibodies testing. Depending upon the results of these, further tests may be undertaken to help identify which part of the hormone cycle may be challenged. One of the problems with general medical screening for thyroid is that generally only TSH levels are tested initially, due to Medicare restrictions of T4 and T3 testing unless TSH is out of the recommended pathology range. The medical pathology range for TSH is between 0.4 to 4.5, however from a Naturopathic perspective, the optimal range for TSH is between 0.5 and 1.5, and we believe if TSH is less than 0.5, this may indicate subclinical high thyroid function, or at the least, your thyroid seems to be overproducing hormones.

Naturopathic Testing

The tests used to determine and treat your symptoms related to hyperthyroidism include:

- TSH levels, T4, T3, reverse T3
- Thyroid antibody test
- Vitamin D
- Iron studies
- Zinc taste test
- Serum zinc and plasma copper
- Live Blood Analysis (LBA)
- Dry Blood test
- Urinary Indicans Test (Test for dysbiosis)
- 43 Foods IgG food intolerance test
- Basal Body Temperature test

Dietary advice

Changes in your diet can greatly improve the symptoms related to hyperthyroidism. Following a modified elimination diet is often our first recommendation and can help you to identify those foods most likely to cause an immune reaction (imbalance.) Generally, a diet of low-inflammatory foods is recommended (this often sees the elimination or reduction of gluten, dairy and acid forming foods such as meat, caffeine and alcohol, etc.) along with an increase in foods containing essential fatty acids (nuts, seeds, fish oil). Additionally, increasing the selenium-rich foods (e.g., mushrooms, fish, Brazil

nuts) and decreasing consumption of iodine- rich (e.g., Celtic sea salt, eggs, strawberries, seaweed/ kelp) is recommended.

Super Foods for Hypothyroidism

There are several super foods which have been found to lower inflammation, provide anti-oxidants to fight free radicals, supply vitamins or minerals that aid in muscle relaxation and much more. Along with drinking at least 2-3 litres of water each day to aid in hydration, the following super foods can help improve the symptoms of hyperthyroidism (depending on an individual's sensitivity):

- Avocado
- Almond
- Carrot
- Tomato
- Banana
- Apple
- Kiwi
- Garlic
- Ginger
- Turmeric
- Blueberry
- Elderberry
- Seeds (chia, sunflower, flax)
- Salmon

Lifestyle advice

There are some simple, but effective changes to your lifestyle which can help to maintain optimum thyroid function: stress-reduction and exercise. Identifying ways to relax each day like yoga, warm baths, getting a massage or meditating can help to alleviate the added pressure on a stressed thyroid function. Alternatively, regular moderate exercise a few days per week has been shown to help with stress levels generally and may help to calm an overactive thyroid. The combination of exercise and relaxation can help to naturally balance your system overall.

Naturopathic Supplement recommendations

During your consultation, our practitioner will prescribe natural medicines initially to treat the symptoms of hyperthyroidism whilst also recommending an individualised integrated detoxification program to start to treat the causes. Please note at our practice we prescribe practitioner only natural medicines due to both the quality and the amounts of active ingredients that they contain

For more information or to make an appointment, contact Mullen Natural Health Centre on (02) 4961 4075 or email us at info@mullenhealth.com.au

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