

THYROID HEALTH

How Your Local ND can Help You Solve Thyroid Problems Using Safe, Effective, Natural Therapies in Conjunction with Conventional Approaches!

What EXACTLY is the Thyroid?

The thyroid gland is located at the front of the neck. It consists of loose tissue in the formation of grape like clusters surrounded by a fibrous capsule supplied with many blood vessels. It has a right and left lobe, blanketing the front of our upper airway in the throat area.

Why is the Thyroid Gland Important?

The thyroid gland incorporates dietary iodine to make the thyroid hormones - called tetraiodothyronine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3). These key molecules act on every cell, organ, and tissue in the body and “turn on” metabolism. Too little thyroid hormone is a medical condition called: **Hypothyroidism**. Too much thyroid hormone is called: **Hyperthyroidism**.

Did you know? The brain, heart, liver, kidneys, bones, skin, hair, and nails all depend on adequate amounts of thyroid hormone for healthy function.

Similarly, the nervous, immune, hormonal, and digestive systems depend on T4 and T3 for regular function. When thyroid hormones T4 & T3 are too high or too low, a person will feel unwell in almost all of these areas.

Symptoms of low thyroid include:

- Fatigue! Most of my clients notice a remarkable change in their energy levels. You may find you cannot do nearly as much as you used to without exhaustion. This may look like an increased need for sleep and daytime naps and a significantly reduced exercise tolerance. For example, feeling short of breath and a racing heart on slight exertion.
- Feeling cold
- Easy “un-explained” weight gain
- Constipation
- Decreased memory, focus and concentration
- A change in a woman’s period: too soon, too heavy, or missing period
- Dry, brittle nails, and hair (Some women loose hair)
- Dry, course skin and/or itchy skin
- Sore muscles and joints



- Depression
- Generally feeling unwell, like “something is wrong”, but your doctor says your blood work is normal

Symptoms of High or Hyperthyroidism:

- High energy, but sometimes extreme fatigue
- Racing heart beat and a rapid pulse
- Feeling hot often, and/or difficulty regulating body temperature
- Weight loss, despite a high appetite
- Diarrhea
- A change in a woman’s menstrual period, similar to hypothyroidism
- Difficulty sleeping – insomnia
- Anxiety
- Generally, “feeling unwell”, like you’ve consumed too much coffee!”

Who is most at risk for thyroid problems?

- Research and clinical experience show that women have more thyroid problems than men. Thyroid conditions are more prevalent in women of peri and menopausal ages.

Can thyroid problems be detected through regular blood testing?

- Yes. TSH (Thyroid Stimulating Hormone) is the most commonly tested by medical doctors and is included on routine blood work as part of a patient’s annual physical. TSH is secreted by the pituitary gland PG (located in the brain). TSH “tells” the thyroid gland to “work” (i.e. make T4 and T3).
- A high TSH level indicates that the TG is not making enough T4 and T3. This leads to the condition of *Hypothyroidism*. For example, the PG is “asking” the TG to work harder to make up for the low T4 and T3 levels in the blood stream.
- A low TSH level indicates that the TG is making too much T4 and T3. This leads to the

condition of *Hyperthyroidism*. For example, the PG is “asking” the TG to make less T4 and T3 because the blood stream has an excess of these hormones.

Do MDs and NDs interpret thyroid hormone results differently?

- Yes. MD’s and ND’s use different reference ranges to determine a diagnosis of hypo or hyperthyroidism. For example, if a patient has a TSH reading of 3 or above an ND will diagnose probable hypothyroidism. Where an MD would wait until the TSH rises above a level of 5 before hypothyroidism is considered or treated.
- ND’s prefer to assess T4 and T3 levels along with TSH. In many cases an ND will request anti-bodies as well. This is because of a *fundamental difference* in naturopathic vs. conventional approaches when it comes to multiple medical conditions (not just thyroid problems).
- ND’s approach a potential medical problem with a broader lens. We look at the whole system and related issues when assessing, diagnosing, and treating our patients.
- ND’s commonly test for nutrient deficiencies in a person with suspected thyroid illness. Particularly, iodine, iron, vitamin D, vitamin B12, zinc, selenium, copper, and chromium. A deficiency in these nutrients can exacerbate and even *cause* thyroid problems, specifically low thyroid.

How does the medical approach differ?

- In the case of hypothyroidism a medical doctor will prescribe a daily, lifetime dose of synthetic T4 (thyroid hormone). These prescription medications are commonly known as: synthroid or levo-thyroxine and are given in very small, but effective doses.
- Hyperthyroidism is treated much more aggressively with radioactive iodine or surgery

to remove a part or all of the thyroid gland. After these treatments, a person will develop hypothyroidism and this is managed by prescription of the same medications for hypothyroid patients. Although most patients feel much better soon after these treatments, the effect is not long lasting. Most people start to feel badly again within six months to one year after these treatments.

- The medical approach only considers one small component of a highly intelligent and complex system. There are vitally important interactions between the thyroid, liver, adrenal, and required nutrients for total thyroid health that are lacking when simply prescribing T4.
- For example, T4 is converted in the liver to T3. T3 is our body's preferred active form of thyroid hormone. Liver conversion of T4 to T3 is heavily dependant on many vitamins and minerals, specifically selenium, copper, zinc, and chromium. A deficiency in any one of these minerals can result in insufficient conversion of T4 to T3, continuing the hypothyroid condition, despite medication.
- Similarly, deficiencies in iodine, iron, or B12 exacerbate low thyroid symptoms, despite T4 medication. If these deficiencies are not addressed, a person will continue to feel unwell, and be plagued by their symptoms, even while properly medicated.
- Prescribing synthetic T4 for a low thyroid condition will aggravate an underlying adrenal deficiency, furthering a person's long-term symptoms of low metabolism in all tissues. The adrenal and thyroid glands work together, so even if the thyroid is treated with synthetic T4, an underlying adrenal deficiency goes un-addressed and over time gets worse.

How can my local ND help with thyroid problems?

Your ND will help you discover the underlying cause of your thyroid condition and employ safe, effective, natural medicines and therapies to help your thyroid

system heal itself, while optimizing your nutrition, adrenal and liver health.

Your ND will take a thorough health history, physical exam, and blood work to assess your overall health and determine a proper thyroid diagnosis, while prescribing an individualized treatment plan specific to *your* needs.

- ND's prescribe a combination of natural vitamins, minerals, herbs and homeopathics aimed to help your thyroid and related organs heal themselves and work more effectively.
- ND's also provide lifestyle counseling and guidance on diet/nutrition, exercise, sleep, and stress coping strategies important for thyroid and total body health.
- Your ND may also recommend other complimentary treatments such as: Acupuncture, Osteopathy, or Massage to improve your thyroid condition.

Natural Ways to Care for Your Thyroid:

Address Underlying Environmental Concerns:

- Pesticides can harm thyroid tissue and interfere with thyroid hormone levels and metabolism. Scientific research shows that organophosphate pesticides (the most commonly used pesticide on our food) decrease T4 and T3 levels.
- Exposure to toxic metals such as, cadmium, mercury, and lead damage the thyroid gland and result in altered thyroid hormone metabolism. It is important to avoid known exposure to these harmful chemicals.
- Consume organic foods, wash your fruit and vegetables thoroughly and drink filtered water.

Did you know? ND's can test a person's body for heavy metals using a Hair Mineral Analysis. This test takes a sample of your head hair, clipped from the nape of your neck. A laboratory will analyze your hair sample and measure your body levels of heavy metals.

Nutrition:

- **Avoid:** Processed, preservative, and sugar-laden foods. These substances harm the body and burden the liver, thyroid, and adrenal glands, interfering with their proper functioning.
- **Consume:** A whole foods diet, consisting of organic vegetables and fruit, beans, nuts, seeds, grains, and organic animal products such as dairy, eggs, and meat.
- **Limit:** People with low thyroid function (Hypothyroidism) should reduce their consumption of foods that contain substances called “goitrogens,” found in the following foods: cabbage, kale, brussel sprouts, mustard, cauliflower, turnip, peanuts, spinach, and soy.
- **Increase:** The trace mineral iodine is an integral component of thyroid hormones. Increase your consumption of iodine by eating foods such as: table salt, sea salt, seaweed, fish, and shellfish. Other foods such as: beans, nuts, peppers, swiss chard, onion, and garlic are good sources of iodine (provided the soil contains sufficient quantities of iodine).

Lifestyle:

- Aerobic exercise, full spectrum light and stress management support proper thyroid function.
- Conversely, stress, sleep deprivation, and excess alcohol intake impair thyroid hormone function.

Natural Supplements:

- Potassium Iodide and Kelp provide the thyroid gland with essential iodine to make T4 and T3.
- B-vitamins, omega 3 oils, iron, vitamin D, selenium, zinc, copper, and chromium may be important to help your thyroid system heal itself and optimize total body health.

Your ND will help you determine what the best natural supplements, dose and duration are for you. You will be given an individualized treatment plan, including healthy lifestyle guidance and counseling unique to *your* needs.

If you or a loved one is suffering from a thyroid problem, visit your local ND to help you heal and feel vital, strong, and healthy again!



Heidi McGill is a registered doctor of naturopathic medicine. She has owned and operated Healing Foundations since November 2006. She has helped dozens of families discover their best balance for overall wellness in body and mind, using the principles and practices of naturopathic medicine. Dr. Heidi regularly appears as “Guelph’s Naturopathic Expert” on Inside Guelph a local Roger’s T.V. program. She also writes articles on topics that matter to you. Dr. Heidi is focused on educating you about how your body functions in combination with the natural and cultural environment. She is genuinely passionate about guiding you towards optimal health, vitality and more joy in your life.

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