Fatigue, Weight Gain, and Foggy Brain? It might be your thyroid.

Many of us believe that fatigue, weight gain, foggy brain, and other low-grade discomforts are just a normal part of aging. However, it may be your thyroid that is responsible for these common complaints.

What is the thyroid?

The thyroid is a small butterfly-shaped gland that sits at the base of the neck. The most important hormones manufactured by the thyroid are triiodothyronine (T3) and thyroxine (T4). These hormones play a significant role in the metabolism, growth, and development of the human body. Thyroid hormones affect every cell, tissue, and organ in the entire body. Having the proper amount of thyroid hormones is essential to your overall health. Too much or too little of these hormones can create several uncomfortable symptoms and leave you feeling downright terrible.

What is a thyroid disorder?

According to the American Thyroid Association, more than 12 percent of the U.S. population will develop a thyroid condition during their lifetime. They also estimate that roughly 20 million Americans currently have some form of thyroid disease, many of which go undetected. Undiagnosed thyroid disorders can contribute to more severe conditions such as cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis and may also be linked to infertility.

Thyroid disorders fall into two different categories:

Hypothyroid
When there is **not enough** thyroid hormone

Hyperthyroid
When there is **too much** thyroid hormone

Hypothyroid conditions are more prevalent than hyperthyroid conditions and are more common in women than men. Advanced age may also increase susceptibility to a thyroid condition.

Riordan Clinic

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Symptoms of hypothyroid

Hypothyroid symptoms can be characterized by a general “slowing down.” This can affect metabolism, cognitive function, digestion, heart rate, and more. Some of the most common symptoms of hypothyroid include:

- Fatigue
- Weight Gain
- Fluid retention
- Dry skin, Hair loss
- Cold intolerance/ Low body temperature
- Hoarseness
- Goiter (enlarged thyroid gland)
- Excess fluid in body tissues
- Constipation
- Memory problems
- Decreased concentration
- Depression
- Irregular or Heavy menstrual periods
- Infertility
- Muscle pain or tenderness
- Slow heart rate

Symptoms of hyperthyroid

When there is too much thyroid hormone, a person may experience feeling “amped up.” This may include symptoms such as:

- Anxiety, Irritability or nervousness
- Weight Loss
- Insomnia
- Goiter (enlarged thyroid gland)
- Muscle weakness or tremors
- Irregularity or loss of menstrual periods
- Eye irritation or vision problems
- Intolerance to heat

Causes of thyroid disorders

Several things can impact how well the thyroid functions and the severity of the symptoms. Common causes of thyroid disorders include:

- Iodine deficiency
- Autoimmune conditions such as Hashimoto’s thyroiditis (hypothyroid) and Grave’s disease (hyperthyroid).
- Inflammation of the thyroid caused by a virus or bacteria
- Thyroid nodules
- Cancerous tumors on the thyroid gland
- Medical treatments such as radiation therapy, surgery, and some medications
- Genetic disorders

Lab tests to assess thyroid function

Our LifeCare lab profile is an excellent way to evaluate thyroid health and other factors that may affect the function of the thyroid gland.

Markers included in the LifeCare profile are:

TSH (Thyroid Stimulating Hormone)

TSH is the hormone that tells your thyroid to produce more or fewer thyroid hormones based on levels detected in the blood. High TSH may indicate that not enough thyroid hormone is circulating, and low TSH may indicate that there is too much thyroid hormone circulating.

Free T3

Free T3 is the active and more usable form of thyroid hormone. Most T3 is produced from the conversion of T4 to T3. Free T4 – Free T4 is the storage form of thyroid hormone and is converted to T3 as the body needs it. Normal T4 levels do not necessarily indicate healthy thyroid function as the body must be able to convert T4 effectively to function optimally.

Reverse T3

T4 can also be converted into Reverse T3. RT3 is another inactive form of thyroid hormone, and it can compete with T3 for the binding sites on cells. Your provider will look at the ratio of T3/RT3 when assessing overall thyroid function.
Also included in the LifeCare Profile are measurements of the other steroid hormones: DHEA-S, Estrogen, Progesterone, and Testosterone. Your provider will look for clinical correlations between the levels of thyroid hormones and these steroid hormones to get a full picture of thyroid function.

Other factors to consider in diagnosing thyroid disorders

It is not uncommon for some patients to return normal lab results, but still have an array of symptoms that point to abnormal thyroid function. This why an extensive physical exam, medical history, and family history are recommended and are the standard of care at Riordan Clinic.

Integrative therapy for thyroid disorders

Thyroid disorders are often the result of systemic imbalances rather than just a lack of or overproduction of thyroid hormones. Our approach is to view the disorder from all angles, seeking to find the root cause. Treatment may include dietary and lifestyle changes, supplements, and medication when necessary.

Common therapeutic recommendations include:

Diet

if an autoimmune condition is the cause of abnormal thyroid function, then certain foods must be avoided. Your practitioner may recommend food sensitivity testing or an elimination diet to determine specific trigger foods.

An anti-inflammatory diet rich in whole, unprocessed foods is always recommended for optimal health and wellness.

Lifestyle

Stress can have a significant effect on your thyroid and overall health. Stress hormones can impact the production of thyroid hormones and the conversion of the storage form of thyroid hormone (T4) into the active form of thyroid hormone (T3).

Stress management techniques such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness are a few practices that can help mitigate the effects of stress on your body.

Supplements

The thyroid depends on several different nutrients to function optimally. These include Iodine, Selenium, Zinc, Iron, L-tyrosine, Vitamin A, Vitamin D, and several B Vitamins, to name a few. While they may be obtained through diet, you may need a little extra support from supplements.

Your practitioner may recommend advanced micronutrient testing to determine if you are deficient in these key nutrients.

Prescription Medication

In some cases, other medical interventions such as prescription medications may be necessary to alleviate symptoms and ensure the body is getting the proper amount of thyroid hormone to function optimally. A thorough assessment of your lab work, medical, family, and lifestyle history will be conducted before these interventions are implemented. You must work very closely with your provider to determine proper dosages.

Your provider at Riordan clinic may choose to work with synthetic thyroid medications such as levothyroxine, Synthroid, liothyronine, and Cytomel or desiccated thyroid hormones such as Armour, NP Thyroid, WP Thyroid, or Nature Thyroid.

If you think you might have thyroid dysfunction, call to make an appointment with one of our knowledgeable practitioners or schedule a lab draw. We look forward to working with you to obtain your REAL health!

For more information about any of the services offered by the Riordan Clinic, give us a call at 1-800-447-7276 or visit our website at riordanclinic.org.

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