

Thyroid Health

The universe sends us messages all the time. Are you paying attention? In my mid-twenties, butterflies began appearing more and more in my life whenever I was outside. I just thought it was luck that I just happened to see a butterfly so often. Now, you may think this is just an everyday normal occurrence that can happen to anyone, and that's what I thought for the first few years until I realized there was something more to it. The thyroid is known as the "butterfly gland." What better way for the universe to remind me to take care of my thyroid than having beautiful butterflies flutter around to remind me? Since this realization, I've always kept my thyroid health in the back of my mind. Unfortunately, having it in the back of my mind hasn't been enough because my condition has only worsened with time/age. Since I'm aware of the fact that the human body is resilient and designed to be healthy and vibrant, I trust in its innate ability to heal itself when I give it the tools it needs.



My thyroid condition is the most common, HYPOTHYROIDISM, meaning an underactive thyroid. I've been fortunate enough to work closely with a doctor who is beyond knowledgeable about hormones, and more importantly who respects my holistic lifestyle and approach. Due to our collaborating efforts, I'm almost there with rebalancing my underactive thyroid. It's been a long and tricky journey, but I'm excited to share only some of the ways in which have helped along the way. If I shared them all, we'd be here all day reading this!

Please know that I share my personal stories for you to understand that I am on a journey of health and wellness like everyone else. I have my healthy days and unhealthy days and my obstacles and triumphs along the way. I want to explain how I'm doing whatever I can to heal my thyroid holistically to give you the strength and confidence to do the same with your body and its ailments (whatever they may be). However, hear my disclaimer loud and clear: The information here is not intended to be a replacement for professional medical diagnosis or treatment for a medical condition. It consists solely of nutritional and lifestyle recommendations to support a healthier body. When you do make a plan to heal yourself holistically remember that illness doesn't happen overnight...and either does healing. Practice patience.

What is the thyroid and what does it do?

The thyroid is a small gland, shaped like a butterfly, located in the lower part of your neck. The function of a gland is to secrete hormones. The main hormones released by the thyroid are triiodothyronine (abbreviated as T3), and thyroxine (abbreviated as T4). It stores and produces hormones that affect the function of virtually every organ in our bodies.

Hypothyroidism (autoimmune Hashimoto's or otherwise) symptoms include but are not limited to:

Weight loss resistance

Sudden weight gain

Constipation

Fatigue

Lethargy

Low energy

Pale, dry skin, itchy

Brittle nails and hair

Irregular menstrual cycles, female hormonal imbalances

Low body temperature

Hyperthyroidism symptoms (which can mimic other problems making it hard to diagnose) include but are not limited to:

Enlarged thyroid

Bulging eyes

Difficulty sleeping

Rash on lower legs

Rapid heartbeat

Weight loss

Fatigue

Anxiety

Diarrhea

Go to sleep.

I am mentioning this first because I feel that above everything else sleep is key. It wasn't until I dictated a specific bedtime to ensure enough sleep that I noticed a major improvement in my thyroid. We are designed to rise from the sun's light, and go to sleep once it has set (or at least no more than 2 hours after it has set). Umm, but because of our endless list of things to do, our brightly lit house, late night TV, working late in front of computer screens, and playing on our phones or iPads after dark we have completely disrupted our circadian cycle and are sleep deprived. What you can do: Get to sleep by 10:30pm. Minimize your exposure to bright lights after dark (start to dim lights or not keep as many on). Sleep in a room that is completely dark (the alarm clock next to you should be at least 3 feet away from your head and covered so that it's glow doesn't light up the room). Be sure to eat light dinners and go easy on the sweets...a heavy meal with a dessert may disrupt the sleep cycle (I'm still working on this one!). If you have issues with falling/staying asleep, this is when you want to practice your pranayama (yogic breath-work) to help wind your body and mind down to sleep.

Buy organic, only organic.

The produce that we purchase from the grocery store is grown from soil devoid of nutrition, forced to life with harsh chemical fertilizers and "protected" with toxic pesticides. Eating organic foods for just five days can reduce bodily pesticides to undetectable levels. (Take a moment and re-read that sentence) Removing toxic products (foods, cosmetics, cleaning supplies, etc.) from your immediate environment and replacing them with more natural alternatives will assist with the restoration of overall health. This goes for animal foods as well. Search for naturally raised, grass-fed, organic animal products. Factory farmed animals are deficient in vitamins and minerals, sick most of their lives, and are fed a constant stream of antibiotics. Meat eaters, check out [US Wellness Meats](#) for happy and healthy raised animals. Sure, organic is more expensive but isn't your health worth it? If you don't spend it now, unfortunately you'll spend it later on medical bills.



Meditate on a butterfly.

Stress is a part of life, but how we handle and manage stress is what's key. Fill your schedule with activities, practices or moments that allow you to mellow out. At least once each day I pause and take a few deep breaths. During that time I imagine a beautiful bright blue butterfly sitting at my thyroid flapping it's wings. The color blue correlates with the 5th (throat) chakra (Vishuddha chakra) and its glowing wings flapping are helping to activate my sluggish thyroid gland. To close my brief practice I chant 3 long and loud "OMs" because the vibration of the sound is very healing to the thyroid gland. It also crowds out the incessant chatter in my mind and allows me to center myself. Give it a try and see how it feels for you.

So long, Soy.

We've all heard this debate...is soy healthy or not? Though soy when eaten in moderation is healthy and balancing, too much soy consumption can dampen thyroid function in some people. Unless the soy you're consuming is fermented, you're putting your health at risk. Soy milk, soy cheese, soy lecithin (an ingredient you can find in most packaged foods), and soy infant formula are all examples of extremely unhealthy forms of soy. When a product contains soy of any kind in its ingredients, beware. Another primary reason for avoiding soy products is because the vast majority of soy grown in the US is genetically modified (GM). Unfortunately, this also means my beloved tofu! I now only treat myself to (only organic) tofu 1 – 2 times a month. Instead, I rely on yummy tempeh. Examples of health promoting fermented soy foods include miso, tempeh and natto. Soy is a serious topic that you can read more about on [Dr. Mercola's: Got thyroid problems? Then stop consuming this "healthy" food.](#)

Sip on nourishing bone broth.

Bone broth is basically a stock, but it's richer, more gelatinous and much more nutritious. It's ridiculously good for our immune system as it's jam-packed with trace minerals that are easily absorbed by our bodies such as calcium, magnesium and phosphorus. Bone broths are used successfully in treating gastrointestinal disorders and are effective in restoring a healthy mucosal lining in the stomach that has been shown to benefit people with stomach ulcers. Anyone suffering from thyroid conditions will find bone broth extremely advantageous. I pour warm bone broth into a teacup at some point each day with a sprinkle of sea salt. As unpleasant as it may be to sip on it, I pray over the cup each day and thank the animals for the nourishment it's going to bring my body. It's an acquired taste that I've grown to tolerate and I highly recommend it for healing (on a number of levels). Check out this link to make your own [mineral rich bone broth](#) or order it from [The Brothery](#) (where I order mine from to make my life easier). Please remember that the quality of the animals used in making bone broth matter.

Drink filtered water that's fluoride-free.

When you're on the more constipated (HYPO) side of things, water is very important. Take your body weight, divide it in half...that equals approximately how many ounces of water your body needs each day. But before you go chugging water from the tap or even from most bottled water, know that there is a known toxin that may be lurking in it. It has been established that fluoride has the ability to alter our endocrine function, yet this fact is being ignored by the agencies and associations that continue to promote the practice of water fluoridation. Consuming it internally allows this known toxin into our delicate tissues and puts our bodies at very serious risks. It is beneficial to avoid fluoride as much as possible. Buy toothpaste/mouthwashes from a health food store that is fluoride free – my favorite is [Auromere](#), but there are quite a few other fluoride-free brands. Choose smaller coldwater fish such as salmon and halibut that usually have less mercury. Avoid tap water, which is full of fluorine and chlorine. Both these chemicals can inhibit your bodies ability to absorb iodine. Unfortunately, a store bought *Brita* or *Pur* filter will NOT do the trick. If you're looking for a filter for crystal clean filtered water, purchase a [Berkey](#)! I've got one and LOVE it. It's affordable, pretty in the kitchen and simple to use. I have to change the filters maybe twice a year. It's well worth it and now I know I'm ingesting and cooking with *just* water. Be mindful of what you're drinking water out of as well. Plastics leech BPA into the water, which are also endocrine disrupters. Glass or stainless steel is a great alternative, and a great way to reduce waste. Check out a [Sigg](#) bottle or use plain old mason jars!



Skip the stimulants.

Coffee and alcohol can upset the glandular system, resulting in imbalance. Hypothyroidism makes the adrenal glands susceptible to overwork and burnout. The adrenal glands can only take so much stimulation before they begin to under-function. Weaning off of stimulants, including coffee, soda and tea, can help the adrenal system heal and recharge. Replace with herbal teas and revisit the first point about the importance of sleep! What are other stimulants in your life? I understand that we have ridiculously busy lives. Take a step back and reevaluate things. What responsibilities can you let go of or say no to? Your health depends on it.

Cook up those goitrogens.

Goitrogens, found in many foods, inhibit the body's ability to use iodine, promote goiter formation and act like anti-thyroid drugs causing HYPOthyroidism. Thankfully, goitrogenic compounds are deactivated by heat/cooking. Foods from the brassicaceae family (aka cruciferous veggies) contain goitrogens: broccoli, cabbage, kale, collard greens, mustard greens, cauliflower, watercress, Brussels sprouts, radishes, turnips, book choy, arugula, daikon, rutabaga and others. So these veggies are fantastic for you, but not in their raw state.

These veggies need to be steamed, sautéed, heated. It doesn't mean you can never have a raw piece of broccoli, but for the most part, heat them when you can. Unfortunately, with the new juicing rage, most green juice contains goitrogenic foods because of the raw greens being juiced. This again doesn't mean to avoid completely, but don't have one every day. Keep in mind, a pickled vegetable (fermented) is actually cooked. The action of salt and pressure cooks the veggie, even though it's considered raw.



Get outta here, Gluten!

A sure way to kick your thyroid's butt is to consume gluten. Gluten is a protein found in certain grains including rye, wheat, barley, some oats (due to cross-contamination concerns), spelt, and triticale, though it also gets added to a lot of processed foods, sauces and alcohol, beauty products, stickers and stamps, and even some thyroid medication. Pretty much, it's everywhere and if you aren't specifically looking out for it, you're probably consuming it in high doses. Gluten can potentially cause an array of symptoms that vary according to the individual ranging from a mild food allergy or intolerance, to the precipitation of other diseases, or to full-blown autoimmune Celiac disease. A lot of people's immune systems react negatively to this protein. In fact, recent information from Johns Hopkins show that nearly 1 in every 100 people suffer at the hands of gluten. Yea, it's a huge problem. As far as gluten having to do with thyroid disease and/or autoimmune disease...well, because the autoimmune response is still not completely understood, there is currently little or no treatment to arrest the process of self-attack and destruction. It is hypothesized, that certain proteins cause the inflammatory reactions that manifest as autoimmune disease. So when it comes to gluten (which happens to be a protein), the theory is that ingestion causes the inflammatory immune system response. Because grains were not cultivated until just 10,000 years ago during the first Agricultural Revolution, (mere split seconds ago, evolutionarily) our bodies may not have yet evolved to accommodate grains and gluten and their proteins. Have you noticed any issues when you consume gluten? I know for me, I get bloated, feel so tired, wake up with achy joints the next day, get plugged up in the bathroom, and can't concentrate or think clearly. Not cool at all. But what is cool, and I can't even believe I'm saying this, is NOT eating it anymore! It's easier than you think and really does make a difference in your health and quality of life. Let me know if you need help with this, I can certainly help.

Pump up the fats.

Many dietary oils can negatively affect thyroid health. We cook with them almost every day and they are plentiful in commercially prepared foods. Coconut oil is one of the most stable oils because of its medium chain triglycerides. It's also a wonderful way to support your thyroid gland. Coconut oil can also raise basal body temperatures while increasing metabolism. It is saturated and stable when heated, making it one of the best oils for cooking. Never eat margarine. And read every label on packaged foods. If vegetable oil or soybean oil is listed, don't buy it. Increase your intake of fatty acids with foods like flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts and cold water fish. Fatty acids are essential for healthy thyroid function. I highly recommend [Green Pasture's](#) fermented cod liver oil capsules.

Be patient with your body, results will not happen overnight. Nourish your body with the care and food it needs to heal itself. Let me know if I could be of any help. Thyroid disorders can be very delicate to balance, so it's strongly recommended that you work closely with a trusted practitioner in making dietary, lifestyle and nutritional supplement changes.

For a lot more information about everything thyroid related, please check out this link on [Thyroid 101](#).