



Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service

INFORMATION SHEET



HASHIMOTO'S DISEASE

Hashimoto's Disease is the name given to a particular kind of goitre cause by autoimmune disease. Although the thyroid gland is enlarged, there is evidence of hypothyroidism. In adults this is the most common cause of autoimmune hypothyroidism. It is sometimes called Hashimoto's thyroiditis because it involves inflammation of the thyroid. It strikes five times more in women than men. At first, you may not feel ill, you may develop a **small** goitre. With time, this may become tender and feel uncomfortable when you swallow. Curiously, when the disease first develops, you may actually develop the symptoms of an **overactive** thyroid – you may lose weight, your heart may pound, your digestive system may go into overdrive, you may suffer from diarrhoea, you may feel intolerable to the heat and your eyes may become wide and staring. Don't worry, such problems are only temporary, and as the disease progresses, the thyroid becomes less and less active and the typical signs of hypothyroidism sets in.

The most common cause of myxoedema in the UK is autoimmune thyroid disease. Many people have antibodies to thyroid tissue, but not all of them have myxoedema (low thyroid).

What exactly is an auto-immune disease?

Certain defensive cells in your body which are there to fight diseases, have mistakenly decided that your thyroid cells are not yours – they are "foreign" enemy cells. Autoimmune disease of the thyroid gland can cause either **under** or **over** activity of hormone production.

Some of the autoimmune diseases include Pernicious Anaemia, Diabetes Mellitus, Addison's Disease, Rheumatoid Arthritis amongst others.

In 1912, 30 year old Dr. Hakaru Hashimoto studied four middle aged Japanese ladies. Each had a firm swelling in the neck and symptoms of sluggishness, weight gain and a particular dislike to the cold. Dr Hashimoto was so diffident about his paper that he sent it to be published in Germany rather than at home in Japan. It wasn't until 1956 however, that a group of Americans worked out the autoimmune nature of the problem. Hashimoto's was the first illness shown to be due to antibodies made by the immune system against its own body tissue.

Usually the attack on the thyroid by the antithyroid antibodies has been going on for many year's before it is recognised. Hashimoto's disease is thought to be the most important cause of damage to the thyroid which prevents it working properly – hence the research still needed in this area, and linked with all other autoimmune conditions.

Research is constantly generating new insights into the causes, and it is becoming increasingly clear that there is now a genetic link to the disease. There are other environmental factors which suggest a contributory cause to auto-immune disease. Coal tar (anthracene), found in some dyes and food additives, has been connected. Also the over-use of antibiotics, but most importantly the rising incidence's of radiation leaks and thyroid disorders begs the question – **Is there a definite link?**

Such questions and suggested contributory factors need urgent research in view of the increase in thyroid disorders.

Currently, blood testing for thyroid disorders need to be standardized – this would help in further research. The treatments are good for some, but a lot depends on the reading of the blood analysis by each individual medic.

If the UK could lead the way by registering every thyroid disorder using the same blood test formula, the research into causes, or the main cause, of these disorders would be made simpler. As we now stand, researching these disorders lead us down to many lanes of effect and causation.

REFERENCES:

Understanding Thyroid Disorders (Dr A D Toft) – BMA Publication

Coping with Thyroid Problems (Dr J Gomez) – Sheldon Press

Thyroid Disorders (Dr R Hillson) – Vintage Press

Thyroid Disease, The Facts (R.I.S Bayliss & W M G Tunbridge) – Oxford Medical Publications

Thyroid Problems (P Westcott) – Thorsons

C.A.T.S RECOMMENDS YOU ALWAYS SEEK YOUR DOCTORS ADVICE

Disclaimer

The purpose of this information leaflet is to help those suffering with thyroid disease. Whilst every effort is made to provide accurate information, it is impossible to ensure that the information given is relevant to every individual. No responsibility is accepted by CATS and it is recommended and essential, that if in any doubt about your condition, that you should always contact your doctor, specialist physician or surgeon to seek medical advice.