



Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service

INFORMATION SHEET



DIET (LOW THYROID SUFFERERS)

Although many people with myxoedema are overweight, this is mostly fluid and will disappear as the Thyroxine treatment takes effect. However, if you were overweight before your thyroid gland slowed down, you will still need to do something about this problem. Owing to the myxoedema your cholesterol level will also probably be high. This too will resolve, unless you have an underlying tendency to high cholesterol. However, while your body is sorting itself out under the Thyroxine treatment, start looking at the sorts of foods you are eating, and their quantities. The constipation that often develops in low thyroid people is another factor that you ought to consider.

‘You are what you eat’ A healthy diet should contain lots of high-fibre starch carbohydrate foods such as wholemeal bread, potatoes in their jackets, beans, pulses and oat bran; but little sugary carbohydrate food like sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cookies and plain sugar. Your diet should be especially low in animal fats like butter, cream, hard cheese or fatty meat. And, if you were overweight before you became a low thyroid sufferer, do not eat too much as your appetite returns. If you are constipated eat plenty of soft fruit and vegetables.

DIETS THAT UPSET THE THYROID

Chronic overeating – a brief binge, especially of the sweet-tooth variety, sets off the thyroid into releasing extra T3. This speeds up the metabolism for an hour or so, and does something towards using up the excess.

In response to continued overeating, however, the thyroid goes on producing more T3. The increased rate of metabolism throws a strain on the heart, circulation and breathing apparatus. You know that you are overstepping the mark if your heart starts hammering and you are uncomfortably and slightly short of breath.

The rev-up happens only while you are still overloading your body with nourishment: it is not affected by your actual weight. You can be 20 stone, but now eating an average diet, with a stationary weight, and your thyroid won't react at all: your metabolic rate will be normal.

Under nutrition – while over eating puts and mild strain on your thyroid, eating too little really upsets it. If you start on a slimming jag or for some other reason you suddenly cut down drastically, within a day or two your thyroid has responded. It starts converting T4 into inactive reverse T3 instead of the active hormone. The effect is an immediate reduction in the rate at which the body burns up the nourishment.

You are likely to feel cold, and because of the effect on your heart rate and circulation, you may develop a headache. You may have noticed this at the beginning of dieting, or if you miss several meals consecutively for other reasons. As little as 1 ½ oz of biscuit, bread or a banana will put you right straight away. If you continue on a restricted diet, your body resets to a lower metabolic rate to allow it to run economically on whatever nourishment is available.

It is T3 that actually controls the metabolism, from T4 which has been converted. Initially, while T3 levels are down, your T4 output stays near normal for some time. Finally, if there is still a food shortage, T4 output is reduced too. The mental and physical slowdown of underactive thyroid then comes into effect.

The key to recovery is a carbohydrate diet. An 800 kcal meal – say pizza and apple pie – gives you a flying start towards normal thyroid function. A fatty diet may fill you up but it does nothing to restore normality to your metabolism. A high-protein diet is only slightly better than this, probably because the body can make sugar out of protein, though not from fat.

If you are feeling depressed or tired, it can be hard to eat well. However, a healthy diet can not only help you to feel better physically, it can also be a way of enabling to feel more in control of you life.

In general, you should eat the sort of diet now recommended for health. This means aiming to get at least five helpings of fruit and vegetables a day, and some experts now say we should aim for more. At the same time, you should be cutting down on saturated fats and replacing them with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. These can be found in nuts, olive oil, seeds and oily fish. Carbohydrates are burned easily by the body, so fill yourself up with wholemeal bread, rice, pasta, and baked potatoes. People with problems with diet may need to take additional supplements but these can sometimes be costly and not needed if a healthy eating plan is established and adhered to. Try not to skip meals, as this can lead to low blood sugar and aggravate feelings of tiredness (sugar as stated before is not the answer – wholemeal bread for instance). This will give you more energy – this makes the best use of thyroid and will keep your levels even.

N.B. A note about Thyroid Function Tests – always inform your Doctor if you are taking pain killers – aspirin for instance, can interfere with the Thyroid Function Test. I know this is not specifically about the food that you eat every day, but remember medicines and supplementary vitamins; alternative foods etc do need to be monitored as to whether they have an adverse effect on your thyroid.

Another point to consider is that taking up to 8 glasses of water a day will help with the elimination of excess fluid.

References:

THYROID PROBLEMS – Patsy Westcott (thorsons) 0-7225-3164-8

COPING WITH THYROID PROBLEMS – Dr Joan Gomez (Sheldon Press) 0-85969-687-1

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.