



## **Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service**

### **INFORMATION SHEET**



#### **PREVENTION, BECAUSE THERE IS NO GUARANTEE OF A CURE**

It is felt that it is important to raise the profile of the thyroid. This is not only to ensure that everyone who is a thyroid sufferer knows about this gland, but also family, friends and their medical advisers, in fact, everyone.

Preventative medicine has now been a major issue with the National Health Service for many years and campaigns are still being advertised to stop us smoking, examine our breasts and testicles, be aware of diabetes, heart attacks and strokes. Little attention has been paid to the thyroid gland, which if it fails, could lead to many further conditions such as repeated infections, heart attacks and strokes, and diabetes could be suffered alongside the dysfunction of the thyroid. It is now being found that numerous autoimmune conditions are being related to a thyroid condition. The thyroid plays a part in keeping our metabolism in balance, and therefore ensuring the correct actions within the body of each cell and organ of the body. The thyroid also plays a major part in the body's immune system – it has a defensive role stimulating special cells found in the lymph nodes known as T cells. These T cells help the body to fight infection.

Health screening is an important part of our Health Service and is usually undertaken on a regular basis by good General Practice. Already in most parts of the UK babies are screened for thyroid dysfunction just after birth, but there are many other people at risk of thyroid dysfunctions:

- Patients presenting with repeated infections
- Women in pregnancy
- Women at menopause
- Patients with depression
- Post-operative patients (especially after Pituitary surgery)
- Patients suffering physical and mental trauma (road accidents & bereavements etc)
- Unexplained lethargy and apathy
- Patients after receiving neck irradiation (X-rays)
- People with Downs Syndrome
- Unexplained infertility
- Anyone with an autoimmune condition

Most of the population needs to be checked for thyroid dysfunction and ideally it should be part of the health screening process done on a regular basis throughout life. Furthermore although women are more likely to develop a thyroid condition, it must be remembered that there is a rising incidence in men.

To be aware of your thyroid is to learn a little about the gland and its importance to the proper functioning of your body. It must also be remembered that this gland is vulnerable. It is situated at the base of the neck, a small bow-tie shaped endocrine gland which is controlled by the pituitary gland. Its situation gives it vulnerability – so close to whatever is passing through the throat. Smoking, X rays and environmental pollution are obvious dangers.

Non-obvious dangers such as medications and certain foods have to be taken into account as well as family history of thyroid and/or autoimmune conditions.

As with most conditions we always feel that it could not happen to us. However, a third of the population is a very large number, and taken from that it could be a 1 in 3 chance that anyone could develop a thyroid dysfunction. This is approximately the same as the chances of developing a form of Cancer, including throat cancer. Luckily thyroid cancer has the lowest mortality being one of the most easily treatable forms of cancer.

How do we find out if we have a thyroid dysfunction? There are many symptoms ranging from depression, lethargy, over-activity, under-activity, sweating, feeling cold, change in bowel habits, breathlessness, panic attacks, deafness and eye problems to name a few – and there are many more considering the actions of the thyroid hormones have an effect on every part of the body, both internally and externally.

What do you need to do if you suspect a thyroid dysfunction? Make an appointment to see your Doctor. Remember even doctors admit that the symptoms can be confusing and can lead the doctor to another diagnosis. The blood test should give an indication and it is important for you to ask for the correct blood assessment, that is the TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) and also ask for a Free T4 test which assesses the correct amount of thyroxine (the main thyroid hormone) in the blood. If you continue to feel unwell and the symptoms are not eradicated in time, you must persevere in obtaining your blood tests and ensuring these are done correctly. The longer a thyroid condition is left, the longer it takes for elimination or alleviation of symptoms, and this could lead to further damage to your body's system. If you feel too unwell, it is wise to take someone with you to the surgery to help you to communicate your symptoms to the doctor. There are many cases of thyroid conditions not being properly diagnosed through patients feeling intimidated by an impatient doctor. Good health is your own personal right, and also it is your right to expect the help from your doctor to maintain good health.

If you are feeling well, great! But please be aware of this condition, not only for yourself, but for your family and friends too. If you are in a "risk" category, make sure that you have regular health checks. To those of you who have symptoms and still cannot get the diagnosis, first of all make sure that your doctor refers you to an Endocrinologist or a Consultant General Physician with a particular interest in the Endocrine system. Keep persevering but at the same time keep an open mind as many conditions have similar symptoms and you may need different treatment or even extra treatment to a thyroid or pituitary failure. At the moment all possible hyperthyroid patients are referred to specialists. It would be more in the patients' best interests if all possible thyroid dysfunctions were referred to an Endocrine Specialist.

Above all the self belief in yourselves, the support of your family, friends and fellow thyroid sufferers and the communication of the experiences of this disease will aid your future health and happiness for generations to come.

## **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.***