Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service

INFORMATION SHEET



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LETHARGY - THE TIREDNESS SYMPTOM

Tiredness, lethargy, feeling low, constant sleepiness, mental and physical sluggishness, a degree of inactivity and unresponsiveness verging on the unconscious.
This describes how a thyroid sufferer of both extremes, and in between, can feel whilst their condition remains untreated, or not treated adequately enough. It also describes someone with severe depression, or someone with a type of anaemia. There are also other conditions such as sleeping sickness, etc..
However, with a thyroid dysfunction, ongoing lethargy usually means the patient is not yet balanced or is still suffering from lowered serotonin levels and is very depressed. Therefore, the two conditions need to be addressed by the G.P. - first to check the balance regarding the medication, and second to address the depression perhaps with adding antidepressants to the prescription. If this does not help the condition, then blood tests ruling out anaemia must be done. (It is quite common for a thyroid patient to suffer from either/or the two main forms of anaemia such as iron deficiency and pernicious anaemia - vitamin B12 deficiency).

There is another possibility that ongoing lethargy has become part of that patient`s life and there is a psychological block to eradicating the feeling. In some cases the patient is dubious of finding the energy to challenge the thyroid condition. It takes a great deal of willpower to overcome the "tiredness". This type is described better as a torpid, inert or apathetic state. This is when a good adviser can lead the patient towards meeting the challenges needed. It has to be gently pointed out that without the patient`s input the symptoms will continue and mar the quality of their life. This lethargic state also exacerbates not only the thyroid dysfunction but also the metabolic responses of the body. Without the body being in action the metabolism also becomes sluggish, and this is where the weight issue becomes another thing to be depressed about. The weight incentive usually works with most hypothyroid patients, together with a healthy eating and exercise regime.
On the mental level people must be given challenges within their physical capacity to keep the brain active and most importantly, stop the patient being bored. Boredom and apathy lead to tiredness. When it becomes a "normal" part of your life to feel tired every day, and one falls into the habit of only operating for small lengths of time during the day - then it also become a habit of falling into the undeniable lure of sleep. Unfortunately, this type of sleep does not refresh the person, and vivid, unsettling dreams are often reported as part of this habit. The challenge is try to stay alert either or both mentally and physically for at least 12 hours a day - 16 hours optimum. At the same time, there is nothing wrong in resting after physical or mental endeavours - but only for a short period of time. Within the patient`s physical capabilities a regime of movements and proper nourishment to give energy is needed. Carbohydrates and natural glucose should be part of the daily diet, together with plenty of water. And, conversely when sleep is required (at least 6 to 8 hours per night), to ensure a relaxed, deep sleep by using the simple methods - a milky drink, a warm, scented bath - lavender oil is good - and read until the eyelids droop. Make sure the bedroom is well-ventilated and the bed is smooth and comfortable. Just before sleep, make sure all thoughts are happy ones, memories of good times and scenes of peaceful pleasure. No worries or arguments should be allowed in the bedroom. Stress also can lead to lethargy. Stress levels need to be evaluated by a good counsellor, and therapies undertaken where necessary. Everyone needs some stress in life, it is part of being alive and can be celebrated as part of living but needs to be kept within strict limits.

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.