

How to Boost Thyroid Function

Expert
Reviewed

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An under-functioning thyroid, or hypothyroidism, can impact your energy levels, fertility, mood, weight, sexual interest, and ability to think clearly. Thyroid-related problems can affect all your daily activities. Over 20 million Americans have thyroid disease, while worldwide an estimated 200 million people have some thyroid disease.^{[1][2]} If you have an under-active thyroid, there are ways you can boost your thyroid function.

Method
1

Improving Your Thyroid Function Through Diet

- 1 Eat a diet of whole, fresh foods.** If you have thyroid problems, you should adopt a healthier, clean eating diet plan. This generally means your diet consists is one of whole, non-processed foods. Promoting a healthy lifestyle for yourself leads to healthier thyroid function.^[3]
 - Clean diets full of unprocessed and whole foods help eliminate inflammatory foods, which can have negative effects on your thyroid.
 - Many people who have thyroid issues have gluten sensitivities. Try to limit, or eliminate completely, the gluten in your food.
- 2 Avoid alcohol and stimulants.** To help promote healthy functioning of your thyroid you should avoid alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco products. These products cause stress hormones to increase, which can affect your thyroid and lead to a hormone imbalance.^[4]
 - If you don't want to give up alcohol and caffeine forever, you should cut them out of your diet for a few weeks, then use them in moderation. There are some studies that suggest black coffee may be beneficial for neurological health.
- 3 Incorporate foods that support your thyroid.** Certain foods can help your thyroid work better. For any thyroid disease, make sure you include the foods that support your thyroid gland. These foods include:^{[5][6]}
 - Berries, such as blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, blackberries, elderberries, salmon berries, and blackberries. Berries contain high levels of antioxidants which help boost your immune system and dampen inflammation.
 - Lots of fresh vegetables. Include a wide variety of colors, such as greens, plus red, orange, yellow, and purple vegetables, and all types of vegetables, like leafy, stem, florets, and tubers.
 - Fish, like salmon, mackerel and tuna. These fish are high in omega-3 fatty acids. Non-fish sources of omega-3 fatty acids are walnuts, borage, and flaxseed oils. Omega-3 fatty acids are important building blocks for naturally produced anti-inflammatory substances in your body.
 - Foods with vitamin D. You can eat fish and mushrooms, or dairy products fortified with vitamin D. To increase vitamin D, you can also spend 10 to 15 minutes in the sun.
 - High-quality protein. Try to get one at every meal. Good sources of protein include poultry, beans, eggs, legumes, and nuts.
- 4 Increase your intake of thyroid-supporting nutrients.** You should increase the amount of foods with nutrients that boost the function of your thyroid. Try to eat at least one serving of food containing these nutrients each day.
 - Eat more vitamin A. Foods high in Vitamin A include vegetables, like sweet potato, spinach and other dark leafy greens, carrots, pumpkin, broccoli, red peppers, summer squash; fruit such as cantaloupe, mangoes, and apricots; legumes, meat, liver, and fish.^[7]
 - Tyrosine is essential for good thyroid function. You can find this in turkey or egg whites.

- Selenium also helps regulate thyroid production. Brazil nuts are the best source of selenium. You can also find selenium in tuna, mushrooms, beef, sunflower seeds, halibut, and soybeans.^[8]
- Check your iodine. In developing countries, supplementing your iodine intake with iodine-based salt can improve thyroid function; however, in many developed countries, you may be at risk for an excess of iodine, which can cause autoimmune thyroiditis. Talk to your doctor about your iodine intake and if you need to adjust it.

5 Limit thyroid-suppressing foods. If you have hypothyroidism, that means your thyroid works slower than normal. Some foods may interfere with your thyroid's function by suppressing it, which can make hypothyroidism worse. Limit certain vegetables, such as cabbage, Brussels sprouts, rutabagas, broccoli, and bok choy. These foods can interfere with iodine uptake in the thyroid. If you want to eat them, make sure to steam them and don't eat them raw.^[9]

- It is recommended to limit peanuts/peanut butter as this can interfere with iodine uptake in our bodies.
- It is recommended to eliminate foods which contains high mercury content. Some examples of these foods are swordfish, shark and most tuna.
- You should eliminate foods that have high levels of mercury, such as swordfish, mackerel, shark, and most tuna. These foods interfere with your thyroid.

Method 2

Boosting Thyroid Function Through Lifestyle Changes

1 Minimize stress. Stress can have negative effects on your thyroid. Stress overworks the adrenal glands, which can accompany an underactive thyroid. Cortisol levels are also increased by stress, which affects insulin levels and hunger.^[10]

- Stress also causes people to overeat or turn to junk food, which can negatively affect the thyroid.
- Learn stress-relieving techniques, such as deep breathing, yoga, or tai chi. Other approaches can include meditation, massage, and getting enough sleep.
- Taking time off from your responsibilities can be very beneficial and restorative as well.

2 Do more aerobic exercise. Increasing your level of physical activity can also help boost your thyroid function. You should set a goal of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week.^[11]

- Try walking, swimming, rowing machines, ellipticals, stair steppers, or any form of cardio exercise that you enjoy. Talk to your physician to make sure there are no limitations.
- Start slow and progress at your own pace. Set reasonable goals for yourself.

3 Incorporate more strength training. Strength training can also help boost your thyroid function.^[12] You should add two to three days of strength training to your weekly exercise routine. Strength training also helps promote weight loss and reduce stress.

- Try using weight machines at the gym. You can also lift free weights. Talk to your doctor about the proper exercises for you.

Method 3

Supporting Your Thyroid Function Medically

1 See your doctor. If you have any of the risk factors or symptoms of thyroid disease, see your doctor and let her know your concerns. Thyroid disease can be treated and the outcomes are generally very good. You will need to get a blood test as well as a physical exam and review of your symptoms.^[13]

- Don't put off seeing your physician. Knowing is always better than not knowing.
- Certain medications can interfere with your thyroid function. When you visit your doctor, you should let her know about any medications you take, including supplements or natural, herbal remedies. If you have been prescribed drugs such as lithium, thioamides, alpha interferon, interleukin-2, cholestyramine, perchlorate, expectorants, aluminum hydroxide and raloxifene, talk to your physician about the risk of thyroid disease.

2 Undergo thyroid replacement therapy. Thyroid replacement therapy is a medically prescribed treatment for hypothyroidism. It helps replace normal thyroid function. The most common is synthetic T4 that works the same way as the T4 your body makes.^[14]

- The synthetic T4 is taken once a day by mouth, usually in the morning thirty minutes before breakfast.

3 Take a supplement. You can help boost your thyroid function by taking nutritional and vitamin supplements that provide the body with the nutrients needed to support a healthy supplement. Do not start taking supplements without speaking to a practitioner who is well versed in this area of expertise. Taking supplements to specifically affect thyroid function should be guided approach.^[15]

- You can take supplements for vitamin D, vitamin A, zinc, selenium, B12, and omega-3 fats.
- Make sure when you take a selenium supplement that you don't take over 200 mg a day.^[16]

Method 4

Understanding the Thyroid

1 Learn the importance of the thyroid. The thyroid gland plays a very important role in a number of critical functions. The thyroid helps maintain energy levels, normal temperature, weight, clear thinking, the response of the body to other hormones, and the synthesis of proteins. The thyroid is located at the base of the neck and wraps around the front of the neck, like a bow tie or a butterfly. Thyroid problems can develop suddenly or develop over the course of years.^[17]

- The most common conditions that affect the thyroid are hypothyroidism, which is an underactive thyroid, and hyperthyroidism, an overactive thyroid.
- The most common form of hypothyroid disease is Hashimoto's thyroiditis. Hashimoto's thyroiditis is an autoimmune disorder where the body is producing antibodies to the thyroid. This leads to the decreased production of thyroid hormones and an underactive thyroid.

2 Recognize the risk factors. There are a number of factors that may put you at risk for hypothyroidism. Knowing the risk factors can help you determine if any symptoms you have may be related to your thyroid function. If any of these risk factors apply to you, talk to your physician about thyroid screening. Screening can help diagnose thyroid disease early. These risk factors include:^[18]

- Age: As with many disorders, the risk of hypothyroidism increases as you age.
- Gender: Women are at greater risk for hypothyroidism.
- Family History: Thyroid disease tends to run in families. If a close relative has had thyroid disease, you are at greater risk.
- Autoimmune disease: The presence of any autoimmune disease increases the risk of thyroid disease.
- Medical history of radiation to the neck or chest.

3 Diagnose thyroid problems. Thyroid disease is diagnosed by both physical symptoms and lab results. Your doctor will take blood and test your thyroid stimulating hormones (TSH) to determine if you are at risk.

- Symptoms of hypothyroidism include fatigue, depression, difficulty concentrating, weight gain, slower heartbeats, dry skin, thinning hair, sensitivity to cold, irregular menstrual cycles, constipation, and swelling around the neck.

Sources and Citations

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2. http://www.thyroid.ca/know_the_facts.php
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