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10 Signs of Thyroid Issues

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland at the base of the neck; it produces hormones that regulate several bodily functions. Thyroid hormones are essential for metabolism, as well as for overall growth and development. An overactive thyroid causes hyperthyroidism, while an underactive thyroid leads to hypothyroidism. Both of these conditions can have a serious impact on a person's health and well-being.

1. Changes in Body Weight

The metabolic rate is closely associated with the thyroid. This means an unexplained shift in body weight may signify thyroid trouble. Weight gain with no change in appetite, exercise regime, or stress level is symptomatic of low thyroid hormone production. Excess thyroid production may also provoke weight loss for no apparent reason. The former condition, hypothyroidism, is far more common, especially in women.

2. Extremes of Mood

People with thyroid dysfunction may experience significant changes in their demeanor and attitude. Those with hypothyroidism more commonly experience depression, apathy, cognitive dysfunction, and psychomotor impairment. People with hyperthyroidism may experience anxiety, restlessness, and irritability. As the body works overtime, these people maybe feel hyperactive and unable to relax.

3. Menstrual Changes

Thyroid issues often impact the menstrual cycle of premenopausal women. Physicians typically monitor menstrual activity to confirm suspicions of a thyroid-related diagnosis. Women with hypothyroidism often experience irregular menstrual periods. Bleeding during a period may be heavy or last longer than usual. In other cases, menstrual flow may be light and periods may become more or less frequent. Hyperthyroidism may cause a reduced flow that does not last as long as before, and periods may become irregular. However, changes in menstruation may not occur in all women with thyroid issues, and other medical conditions besides thyroid dysfunction can lead to menstrual changes.



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4. Goiter

Often the most visible sign of thyroid problems is a swelling in the neck -- a goiter. The growth is a result of an enlarged thyroid gland and may develop in individuals experiencing hypothyroidism and those with hyperthyroidism, as well. Both cancerous and non-cancerous nodules can lead to enlargement of the thyroid gland. Anyone who notices swelling in their neck should consult a doctor.

5. Altered Mental Capacity

Thyroid dysfunction may also cause altered mental capacity. When the thyroid gland produces too much hormone, one may experience a lack of concentration and are nervous and easily distracted. When it provides too little hormone, an individual can experience brain fog, slow mental processing, and forgetfulness. In most instances, such subtle symptoms go unnoticed, even though they are among the first to appear. Treatment of the underlying thyroid disorder can often quickly alleviate issues pertaining to cognitive function.

6. Low Sex Drive

Researchers have connected the loss of libido, especially in women, to thyroid problems. Hypothyroidism, in particular, is linked to a low sex drive and problems with fertility. When the thyroid gland produces too few hormones, metabolism and other bodily functions slow. These changes may lead to a temporary disinterest in sexual activity. Once thyroid hormone replacement begins, individuals can expect their libido to normalize. Patients with hyperthyroidism rarely exhibit a loss of libido. In some cases, they experience an enhanced sex drive.

7. Hair Loss

Both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism can adversely affect hair quality and growth. When the thyroid produces too little hormone, hair follicles enter resting mode, which leads to hair loss and dry, brittle strands. This hair loss is not restricted to the scalp alone but also occurs on the limbs, underarms, and even eyebrows. Hyperthyroidism tends to affect only the scalp. Hair loss there is often more severe and noticeable than that caused by hypothyroidism. Fortunately, it is possible to restore full hair growth with appropriate treatment.



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8. Unpredictable Bowel Function

Many patients with thyroid disease complain of unpredictable and dysfunctional bowel habits. Hypothyroidism is often linked to constipation because the slowing of the metabolism also diminishes the movement of food through the digestive tract. This results in compromised gut motility, which makes it difficult to achieve a bowel movement. With hyperthyroidism, conversely, overactive metabolism may lead to very quick passage of food through the gut, thus preventing water reabsorption and the formation of a firm, well-formed stool, and resulting in diarrhea or more frequent bowel movements. The urge to visit the bathroom is particularly strong after eating. Over-the-counter medications for these symptoms can provide temporary relief.

9. High Blood Pressure

Thyroid disorders are also associated with elevated blood pressure. Both people with hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism are vulnerable to the condition. When thyroid hormone production is inadequate, the heart rate slows, impacting the body's ability to pump blood and reducing the flexibility of blood vessel walls. As a result, blood vessels become stiffer and more resistant to blood flow. Together, these may cause a spike in blood pressure. With hyperthyroidism, the blood-pumping mechanism speeds up, which can increase blood pressure and heart rate, causing heart palpitations and excessive sweating in severe cases.

10. Changing Sleep Patterns

Individuals with thyroid conditions are also vulnerable to changes in their sleep cycle. They might find themselves extremely sleepy all the time or very alert when they should be growing tired. The slowing of metabolism and bodily functions due to hypothyroidism causes sluggishness and lethargy, leading to a desire to sleep, even during the day. Hyperthyroidism produces excess energy in the body, leading to restlessness, anxiety, and night wakefulness. The change in sleep patterns is noticeable, affecting functionality throughout the day.

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