



Thyroid can be a drag

ARE you having a harder time concentrating than in the past? Are you colder than everyone around you? Has your "get-up-and-go" seemingly gone on vacation? Are you more tired than three years ago, even if you are doing less? Do you believe this is just part of aging?

Well, it may not necessarily be due to normal healthy aging. In fact these types of symptoms can result from abnormal functioning of your thyroid gland which can be treated.

The thyroid gland is a small butterfly-shaped gland in the throat. When functioning normally, the thyroid gradually releases thyroid hormone into the blood to circulate throughout the body. This hormone is essential for the regulation of metabolism. Both overactive (hyperthyroidism) or underactive (hypothyroidism) thyroid glands can cause serious health problems.

Thyroid abnormalities are fairly common. About one out of 10 women past age 50 has low thyroid hormone levels. The symptoms can include a decline in basal metabolic rate and feeling sluggish, a decreased body temperature often sensed as cold feet, a slow heart rate, and mental function problems.

Other signs include thinning hair,

dry skin, constipation and muscle cramps. Total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol levels can rise. Weight may slowly increase by 10 to 15 pounds, mostly due to fluid accumulation in the body.

Mental problems can manifest themselves as depression and difficulties with memory and problem solving. Hypothyroidism becomes more common with age. Many women with the condition tend to write-off their symptoms as a consequence of aging or perimenopause.

Certainly, other physical problems can cause the same symptoms. However, the long-term effects of low thyroid can be serious and irreversible, so doctors tend to check thyroid function as part of their diagnosis of such symptoms.

THE most common cause of hypothyroidism is a hereditary condition known as Hashimoto's disease. It results from the immune system attacking the body's own thyroid tissue.

However, in some cases hypothyroidism occurs following childbirth. Other causes of low thyroid include viral infections of the thyroid gland, drugs such as lithium and medicines that treat overactive thyroid.

Thyroid hormone contains io-

dine, so adequate intake of this mineral is important for normal production of the hormone. Almost one-third of the world's population lives in areas where the soil is deficient in iodine and foods grown there have little iodine.

An iodine deficiency is an unlikely problem in Hawaii. Foods grown near the ocean typically have plenty of iodine and iodized salt is commonly used. Consumption of large quantities of cabbage, however will decrease the amount of iodine available to the body due to a natural compound that binds with iodine.

On the other hand, too much iodine can actually cause hypothyroidism in people who are sensitive to it. The most common cause of this is eating too much seaweed or taking the drug amiodarone for heart rhythm problems.

In 1998, the American College of Physicians recommended screening women 50 and over, who have any symptoms typical of hypothyroidism. So, if you are experiencing symptoms typical of hypothyroidism, don't hesitate to discuss it with your doctor.

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