

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

THYROID

What is hypothyroidism?

Hypothyroidism is a synonymous term for low thyroid. Simply put, your tissues are not getting enough thyroid hormone to maintain optimal function. This may be due to problems with regulation (from the brain), problems with a low-functioning thyroid gland or poor utilization by the tissues. Many, if not most, people have a combination of reasons.

What is desiccated thyroid?

Desiccated Thyroid is a combination of 80% T4 and 20% T3.

- T4 is the less active form of thyroid that is converted to T3 inside the body.
- Desiccated thyroid is essentially the compounded form of Armour Thyroid.

Is Armour Thyroid the same as desiccated thyroid?

Armour Thyroid and desiccated thyroid in theory are the same; however, they are produced with different fillers and binders. Desiccated thyroid purchased from Hotze Pharmacy does not contain yeast, corn, wheat, soy, sugar, gluten, egg, milk or coconut.

What is a "grain"?

Armour Thyroid (AT) and desiccated thyroid (DT) are measured in grains, just as progesterone is measured in milligrams (mg). One grain of thyroid represents 60-65 mg of thyroid tissue in the tablet (AT) or capsule (DT).

How long should it take before I feel improvement of my low thyroid symptoms?

You may experience improvement of symptoms within 2-4 weeks, but this is unusual. It will take 4-6 weeks for your body to assimilate the full dose of your thyroid, once you are on your optimal dose. Therefore the time frame depends upon the difference between where your levels are now and where they need to be optimally.

This also means you could develop hyper-stimulation symptoms this late after starting a new thyroid medication or after you have made an increase.

This is why it is very important to monitor your resting heart rate and report a resting heart rate over 90 beats per minute as well as feelings of jitteriness or anxiety. This simply means you are on a little too much. If this happens, stop all of your thyroid and call the office within 36 hours to report. We will guide you through the rest. Such side effects usually only last 2-4 days.

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What are low thyroid symptoms?

Low thyroid symptoms include: low energy (malaise or fatigue), difficulty losing weight, cold extremities and cold sensitivity, difficulty concentrating or short term memory loss, depressed moods, hair loss, dry skin, constipation, fluid retention, muscle pain and cramps, joint pain, feeling tired after a full night's sleep, and recurrent and chronic infections.

What labs are monitored while I'm taking thyroid medication?

The primary test is free T4, but it is also very important to monitor your symptoms as they improve. As noted above, you check your pulse and report any negative issues that may arise.

What do I do if I want to increase my thyroid dose?

Call a phone nurse and be prepared to verify your current thyroid dose, report your resting heart rate, your low thyroid symptoms and the last time you made a change to your thyroid medication.

Your nurse does not have the authority to raise your thyroid medication; therefore, she/he will report this information to your provider and your provider will make a decision regarding changes to your thyroid medication.

What should I do if I'm not tolerating my thyroid?

Stop taking all of your thyroid medication and call the office to report your symptoms within 36 hours. You would be speaking to a phone nurse during office hours or the provider on call after hours or on weekends.

How do I check my resting heart rate?

- First you will want to ensure you are and have been at rest for at least 10 minutes before you begin to count your pulse or heart rate.
- Locate your pulse or heart rate at the wrist or neck, count for 15 seconds and then multiply by 4.
- There are 60 seconds in a minute. If you count your pulse for 15 seconds and multiply by 4 this will equal 60 seconds; therefore, you will arrive at how many times your heartbeats in 1 minute.

What if I can't find my pulse or heart rate?

Often times you will be able to feel your heart beating in your neck better than your wrist, but not always.

- Neck: Place your middle finger on your earlobe and slide down your neck towards the collarbone until you detect the beating of your heart then stop and count it.
- Wrist: Turn your hands palm side up (towards the ceiling) and you will find your pulse or heartbeat on the thumb side of your wrist.
- Always make sure you use your middle finger to count your pulse because your pointer finger and thumb have a pulse of their own.

Is heart rate and pulse the same thing?

Yes.

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Why is my general doctor concerned about my thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) level?

There is an inverse relationship between TSH and free T4. As your free T4 level increases it will cause your TSH to decrease. This is normal. In many people however, the TSH mechanism in the brain is left damaged from working too hard when the thyroid gland is sluggish. Therefore, it becomes unreliable as an indicator to judge when you might be on too much thyroid. If this is not taken into account, then one might believe that a low TSH level means you are on too much thyroid. This would only be true if we knew the TSH mechanism was perfectly intact and could never malfunction. By considering how you feel as well as a free T4 level, we can assess how you are doing without that confusion.

We need to warn you: your general doctor may not agree with the continuance of your thyroid medication, especially if your TSH gets below normal, because he may believe this is a signal that you either don't need thyroid medication or you are taking too much.

Often times when a guest does stop taking their thyroid medication their low thyroid symptoms will return pretty quickly. Once this happens, the general doctor has no remedy for these low thyroid symptoms except for a possible recommendation for a drug such as an antidepressant. Therefore, you must decide if you want your labs to be pleasing to your general doctor or if you want to continue to enjoy the benefits of your thyroid.

Should I tell my general doctor I'm taking thyroid medication?

Absolutely! You never want to be untruthful with your treating physician. This is dangerous at best, especially if your general doctor is dispensing blood pressure or any other medications.

Why am I taking thyroid if my free T4 and TSH levels are normal?

Each individual has his or her own normal thyroid range. Ranges from the labs are general human ranges and not individual ranges. Therefore, you may be in "the" range and no longer be in "your" part of that range. At Hotze Health & Wellness Center, we recognize this. If your clinical history strongly suggests low thyroid symptoms while your labs are "in the range," your provider may decide to treat you with thyroid medication.

It may be that your labs are within the normal limits; however, you feel better when your levels are higher in the range than they are prior to treatment with thyroid medication.

Please know that we will continue to monitor your free thyroid hormone levels and ask about possible side effects to ensure safe treatment with thyroid medication.

What is autoimmune thyroiditis?

It's a genetically inherited trait in which the immune system makes antibodies against the thyroid gland. In this case, you may be producing enough thyroid hormone to register a normal free T4 and TSH level; however, the thyroid that you are producing is being bound up by these antibodies, which prevents it from entering your cells where the work is done.

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In this scenario, you will be left with all of the ramifications of low thyroid.

Hypothyroidism is often missed because mainstream medicine typically will test only a total T4 and TSH, not thyroid antibody levels.

Are Hashimoto's and autoimmune thyroiditis the same?

Yes, these are synonymous terms.

How does my doctor know if I have Hashimoto's or autoimmune thyroiditis?

At your first visit to the Center, your provider will check blood levels of two different thyroid antibody levels. If these levels are elevated this will indicate that, in fact, you have Hashimoto's or autoimmune thyroiditis. However, it is possible to have Hashimoto's and these two antibody levels are normal. This is sometimes discovered if the same test is repeated at a later date. It's that simple. Even mainstream medicine will agree with this.

What are symptoms of thyroid intolerance?

While taking thyroid medication you should always monitor your resting heart rate in addition to paying attention to how you feel.

- Your resting heart rate should never be 90 beats per minute or greater.
- If you are taking too much thyroid or not tolerating what you are taking you may feel jittery, anxious, revved up, hot like a furnace is burning inside of you, short of breath, a heaviness in your chest, an awareness of your heart beating and possibly shifting of moods such as exaggerated anger, irritability or crying.

Why are thyroid antibodies only tested on my first visit?

The results are correct most of the time. However, if your situation indicates a need to re-check your antibody levels, your provider will order them.

- In isolated cases your Provider may study these again to see if your antibody levels have decreased with the use of Thyroid medication.
- If your first set was negative, but later your clinical course indicates Hashimoto's is possible, they may be repeated. Still, there are 8 other antibodies identified in the medical literature. You may have those and not have the 2 that are commercially available.

Where is my thyroid gland?

Your thyroid gland is located at the base of your neck in the front of your trachea (the wind pipe). It's shaped like a butterfly.

What should I do if my thyroid gland becomes painful to the touch or enlarged?

Call the phone nurse department and report this finding. Recommendations will be provided once the Nurse has collected your pertinent information and discussed it your provider.

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When can I consolidate my thyroid medication?

Before you combine several lower dose capsules into one higher dose capsule, you want to be sure that you tolerate the dose. Otherwise, you may be paying for capsules that you will have to discard. That can take up to 8 weeks to be sure. You can consolidate your thyroid medication after you've been taking it for 8 weeks, your resting heart rate is below 90 beats per minute and you have no other symptoms of hyper-stimulation such as feeling jittery, anxious, revved up or like a furnace is burning inside of you.

CORTISOL/ADRENAL

Why is my cortisol level only checked at my first visit?

Your serum (blood) Cortisol levels are typically only checked during your first visit to the Center because your cortisol level changes every few minutes. The level at any one time tells us where you are, but can't tell us exactly where you need to be at that precise moment. Morning levels are typically in the upper half of the so-called normal range. So if your level is in the lower half, then this is suspicious that it is lower than it should be. However, if you are one of those "cool-as-a-cucumber" types, your cortisol levels may also be lower than expected. So levels are always considered in the context of your clinical history. Even if cortisol is not started initially, it may be considered later. Borderline levels may also lend insight in cases where low doses of thyroid hormone are not tolerated. In short, use of these levels is individualized. Sometimes, saliva levels may reveal a pattern that a single level would miss.

What is the difference in saliva and serum (blood) levels of cortisol?

Saliva levels offer more information about how cortisol production changes throughout the day and night as opposed to one morning blood level. This may demonstrate inappropriate patterns of production that a single level would miss. How symptoms vary with time and/or activity level may also give great insight into adrenal status.

Saliva is "spit" and is collected into a specimen vial several different times during the day.

Blood levels of Cortisol are collected through standard venipuncture (collected from the arm with a needle).

Why am I taking Cortisol when my levels are in range or even elevated?

Optimal Cortisol levels vary widely as described above. Part of the adrenal fatigue problem is also impaired regulation. This may cause one to overproduce cortisol intermittently, as well as under produce at other times. This is why it is essential to rely on a provider who is experienced in diagnosing and treating adrenal fatigue.

If you are a well-balanced, even keeled, Type B personality, a morning Cortisol level in the single digits could be optimal for you. Conversely, if you are a Type A person who is under emotional and physical stress, you may require a level higher than 20 due to your higher demand for Cortisol.

There is no "magic number" that your provider wants to see regarding your Cortisol levels. Your provider will diagnose and treat adrenal fatigue based on your individual symptoms and medical history.

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The symptoms of adrenal fatigue include those of low thyroid but often include fatigue in the morning, lightheadedness with standing, muscle pain and light sensitivity. Those with a lesser ability to handle stress or recover after stress/exercise often have an issue with adrenal fatigue, as well.

Will taking Cortisol cause me to get fat?

If you are taking more Cortisol than you need or can tolerate, it could create fluid retention that would, in fact, show up on the scale. This is simply a dose issue and should not be confused with "steroid horror stories" one hears from the media. Cortisol is a hormone that you've been making since before you were born. The stories you hear are drug stories and do not reflect Cortisol.

Conversely, if your body is not producing enough, or even overproducing, Cortisol and you don't treat with Cortisol, your own intrinsic production of Cortisol could be contributing to fluid retention.

How can taking Cortisol regulate my own production of Cortisol?

The adrenal glands can become exhausted and essentially lose their rhythm regarding Cortisol production. Once you get into a good restorative REM sleep, your body should begin to produce the Cortisol you need for the next day. However, if you're not sleeping well or your body is taxed with chronic fatigue, stress, allergies or infection, your adrenals can begin to panic, shut down or do both, all in the same day. The low-dose supplementation we use helps take the strain off of overworked adrenals. They are then better able to repair and regenerate.

Cortisol supplementation is very important in these instances. Your provider will supplement with cortisol to retrain your adrenal production regarding timing and amount.

Even if you are "overproducing" cortisol, your provider may use additional cortisol to relieve adrenal strain; essentially calming down the body's reaction to the stressors it has encountered.