

## ▶ The Truth About the

# THYROID

Chronic inflammation, stress, diet and environmental toxins can wreak havoc on the thyroid and disrupt every system in the body, including the metabolism and gut

By Christine M. Okezie, CHHC

**STRUGGLING WITH CHRONIC FATIGUE, WEIGHT GAIN OR depression?** You could be one of the estimated 30 million people in America with thyroid dysfunction. Hypothyroidism, underactive thyroid, is one of the most unrecognized, misdiagnosed health problems today. The disease, vastly misunderstood and disregarded by mainstream medicine, is at the root of the needless suffering of millions, mostly women, who are trying all kinds of pills and diets to lose weight and boost energy. Unfortunately, their efforts will fail unless they learn how to heal their underlying thyroid issues.

Women are approximately 10 times more at risk for thyroid disorder than men. Furthermore, if you're a woman over 35, the odds are higher, as much as 30 percent, according to some estimates.

At the base of your throat on your windpipe sits a butterfly-shaped gland known as your thyroid. The thyroid secretes hormones that regulate the

activities of every cell and every organ in the body. An underactive thyroid has the power to disrupt every system in the body and produce profound changes in every aspect of our health. From our brain to our bowels, things go wrong when the gland is either underactive, producing too little thyroid hormone (hypothyroid), or overactive, making too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroid).

The vast majority of people with thyroid disease have hypothyroidism. Hashimoto's (Autoimmune Thyroiditis) is the most common cause, when the body's own immune system attacks your thyroid.

Here are some of the most common signs of hypothyroidism or sluggish thyroid:

- Weight Gain
- Chronic Fatigue
- Hair Thinning
- Brittle Nails
- Dry Skin



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- Body Aches and Pains
- Excessive Coldness
- Constipation
- Brain Fog
- Memory Problems
- Heavy Menstrual Cycles
- Low Libido

Here are some of the most common signs of hyperthyroidism or overactive thyroid:

- Chronic Anxiety
- De-regulated Appetite
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Heart Palpitations
- Diarrhea
- Irregular Menstrual Cycles
- Elevated Blood Pressure
- Feel Too Warm or Sweat Profusely
- Sleep Problems

So what causes the thyroid to malfunction? In addition to the role of genetics, there are a number of underlying causes, such as:

■ **Chronic Inflammation** — Common food allergens keeping the immune system on constant alert affect thyroid function. Gluten, the protein found in wheat, is the biggest offender, as well as dairy products. Gluten intolerance, which affects an estimated 30 percent of the population, is due to poor diet, damaged guts and chronic stress. Furthermore, genetically modified foods and processed foods, containing artificial sweeteners, chemical preservatives and poor-quality fats, also sets off a chronic inflammatory response interfering with the thyroid.

■ **Adrenal Stress** — Longstanding stress is the enemy of a balanced hormonal system. Overstimulation of the stress response taxes the adrenal glands to produce cortisol, which over time has both direct and indirect effects on thyroid function. Weak adrenal glands drive blood sugar imbalances, which can cause a variety of hypothyroid symptoms. Adrenal stress also disrupts the brain and suppresses thyroid function. Finally, cortisol imbalances weaken the immune system in general and can increase risk for autoimmune disease.



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■ **Nutritional Deficiencies** — Lack of key nutrients, including vitamins A, D, E, selenium, zinc, iron, B12 and omega 3 fatty acids, play a big role in thyroid dysfunction. In fact, so many people struggle for years with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and long-standing bowel problems, many don't even know they have gluten intolerance and are not absorbing these critical nutrients until they start to develop symptoms of hypothyroidism. And even when we are eating a healthful diet,



chronic unmanaged stress can weaken the gut's ability to absorb these key micronutrients and set the stage for thyroid disorders.

■ **Environmental Toxins** — Endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) in our everyday personal care and household cleaning products slow thyroid function by blocking thyroid receptors. EDCs like bisphenol-A, parabens and phthalates are found in food cans, plastic bottles, flame-retardant pajamas, mattresses, soaps, deodorants, perfumes, makeup, air fresheners, detergents and more.

The good news is that with simple nutrition and lifestyle changes designed to address the underlying issues, you can help reduce many thyroid symptoms.

## CONSUME FOODS AIMED TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

■ **Balance Blood Sugar** — Eliminate grain flour products. Focus on eating quality meats and fish, and a lot of green leafy veggies. Get carbs mainly from starchy root vegetables like winter squash and sweet potatoes, moderate amounts of grains like quinoa, and low-glycemic fruit like berries, peaches and melon.

■ **Boost Immunity / Healthy Gut Function** — Avoid processed foods and refined sugars and carbohydrates. Eat organic as much as possible. Remove all foods that can be inflammatory such as gluten, dairy, soy and vegetable oils. Eat cultured and fermented foods. Upgrade to chemical-free household cleaning and body care products.

■ **Nourish Adrenal Glands** — Reduce or eliminate alcohol and caffeine, which disrupt cortisol levels. Don't skip meals. Eat three main balanced meals plus two balanced snacks throughout the day. Incorporate healthy fats like olive oil, coconut oil, avocados, nuts and seeds.

## LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES:

■ **Commit to a Mind Body Practice** — Incorporate daily deep-breathing activities (like yoga, tai chi or meditation) to calm the body,

refocus the mind and decrease stress, which in turn will naturally reduce your cortisol level and optimize thyroid function.

■ **Prioritize Regular Sleep Routine** — Aim to get at least 7 hours of sleep a night.

■ **Stop Chronic Dieting and Over-exercising** — Studies show that extreme diets like very low-carb or low-calorie diets and punishing exercise do more harm than good and wreak havoc on hormone health.

■ **Vitamin Supplementation / Adaptogenic Herbs** — Consider vitamin D, a high-quality probiotic, omega 3 fish oil and B vitamins. Supplement with stress-relieving botanicals like Ashwaganda and Holy Basil.

## THYROID SUPPORTIVE FOODS:

- Mushrooms, Eggs (vitamin D)
- Sweet Potatoes, Carrots, Dark Leafy Greens (vitamin A)
- Eggs, Brazil Nuts, Mushrooms, Quinoa (selenium)
- Pumpkin Seeds (zinc)
- Coconut Oil (lauric acid)
- Chia Seeds, Hemp Seeds, Walnuts, Wild Caught Fish (omega 3 fatty acids)

## GET THE RIGHT HELP:

Finally, seek an integrated health



## Recipe: Portobello Mushrooms Stuffed Quinoa with Walnuts and Golden Raisins

Yield: 6 servings

### Ingredients:

6 large Portobello mushroom caps, stems removed, gills removed  
Coconut oil, melted  
Balsamic vinegar  
Sea salt and black pepper, to taste

### Stuffing:

3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 tablespoon garlic, minced  
3 cups of cooked quinoa  
1 cup grape tomatoes, halved  
1 bunch scallions, sliced  
1 cup golden raisins  
1 cup toasted walnuts, chopped

½ cup parsley, finely chopped  
Crumbled goat cheese (optional)

### Procedure:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly oil the bottom of a large sheet tray or baking dish.
2. Place the mushroom caps on the sheet tray. Brush with melted coconut oil and a splash of balsamic vinegar. Season with sea salt and pepper.
3. Bake the mushrooms for about 15 minutes until slightly soft.
4. In a medium skillet, over low to medium heat, add olive oil and garlic. Cook for about 30 seconds.



Add in the cooked quinoa, tomatoes, scallions, raisins and walnuts.

5. Stir until well combined and heated through.
6. Remove from heat and fold in parsley.
7. Stuff each mushroom cap with about ½ cup of the mixture.
8. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes until cap is very soft.
9. Remove from oven and top with goat cheese.

professional who will run a complete thyroid blood panel with the following 6 key thyroid lab results to get the best picture of what your thyroid is doing:

- TSH
- Free T4
- Free T3
- Reverse T3
- Thyroid Peroxidase Antibodies
- Thyroglobulin Antibodies

For more difficult cases, TRH (thyroid releasing hormone) can be measured using the TRH stimulation test. TRH helps identify hypothyroidism that's caused by inadequacy of the pituitary gland.

Another telltale sign of hypothyroidism is a low basal body temperature (BBT), less than 97.6°F averaged over a minimum of 3 days. It is best to obtain a BBT thermometer to assess this.

At the same time, it's essential to find a health professional who will treat you, the person, and not just consider the lab report. A functional medicine doctor will fully investigate your medical history, family history, all your symptoms, give

you a thorough physical exam and be up to date on the current lab ranges.

Above all, you must be your own advocate when it comes to your health and especially your thyroid health. Be prepared to stand up for yourself, and do lots of research to make sure you get the best care possible. And most importantly, listen to your body. You above all are the best expert in knowing if something isn't right.

### ABOUT CHRISTINE M. OKEZIE

Christine M. Okezie is a graduate of the Natural Gourmet Institute for Health and Culinary Arts in New York, and the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. She founded her company, Your Delicious Balance, to counsel individuals to heal themselves through real food and positive lifestyle choices. Her healing strategies are based on whole foods nutrition, and she guides her clients to adopt a plant-centered way of eating that offers anti-inflammatory and detoxifying benefits to the body. For more information, visit her Web site at [www.yourdeliciousbalance.com](http://www.yourdeliciousbalance.com) or call (201) 889-5001.

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*"The No Diet Cookbook: Learn to Eat for Health and Pleasure," by Christine M. Okezie*