



**GLUTEN  
INTOLERANCE  
GROUP**



# Celiac Disease and Thyroid Conditions

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## **Celiac Disease and Thyroid Disease: The Connection**

Researchers have found autoimmune thyroid diseases to be more common in people with celiac disease than in the general population.

The reasons for this relationship are not entirely clear, but these are the known facts:

- There is a genetic link among many autoimmune diseases.
- It is likely that celiac disease and thyroid disease will occur together because they are both common autoimmune diseases.
- There is evidence that celiac disease may predispose individuals to develop other autoimmune diseases, such as thyroid disease.
- Thyroid disease is often diagnosed before celiac disease; physicians may test for thyroid disease more than celiac disease because it is more common.

## **What does the thyroid gland do?**

The thyroid is a small gland just below your Adam's apple. This gland produces thyroid hormones whose main job is to regulate metabolism. These hormones affect every system in the body and help to control its functions, for example, temperature regulation.

## **Thyroid Disease**

- If the thyroid gland stops producing adequate amounts of hormones, this causes body processes to slow down. This is called **hypothyroidism**.
- If the thyroid begins to over-produce hormones it causes the body's metabolism to significantly increase. This is called **hyperthyroidism**.
- Hashimoto's disease and Grave's Disease are two common causes of hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism (respectively). Both are autoimmune diseases.

## **Hashimoto's Disease (Also called Chronic Lymphocytic Thyroiditis)**

- The body's immune system attacks the thyroid and causes a decrease in production of thyroid hormone (hypothyroidism).
- Hypothyroidism can exist for years with no symptoms appearing until the body becomes over-stressed, e.g. after a pregnancy or a traumatic illness.
- Symptoms can be very subtle and non-specific, mimicking other illnesses, so it is important to consult with your physician about having a TSH thyroid test if you experience the following symptoms:

### **Questions to ask your doctor:**

*Should I take medication for this disease?*

*How long will I need to take this medicine and how will I know when to stop taking it?*

*What are the side effects of these medicines?*

*How often do I need to get my blood drawn to monitor this medicine's effect on my body?*

*Should I take nutritional supplements?*

*Could I have associated food intolerances?*

*What other concerns should I have?*

*How often should I follow-up with the doctor?*

- Tiredness
- Weight gain
- Dry skin
- Often feeling cold and low body temperature
- Coarse, dry hair or hair loss
- Enlarged thyroid gland in the neck
- High cholesterol
- Dizziness
- Depression
- Muscle cramps
- Constipation
- Decreased ability to concentrate or difficulty remembering things
- Slowed heartbeat
- Yellowish skin
- Nausea
- Lack of coordination

### Grave's Disease

- The body's immune system attacks the thyroid and causes it to produce too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism).
- Hyperthyroidism is not as common as hypothyroidism.
- Common Symptoms:
  - Weight Loss
  - Rapid pulse
  - Protruding eyes
  - Feeling too warm
  - Nervousness
  - Insomnia
  - Irritability
  - Heart palpitations
  - Diarrhea
  - Muscle weakness

### Testing

- Initial testing is done by measuring TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone). This is currently the best screening test for thyroid function. After reviewing these results, a doctor may want to do more specific thyroid tests to determine whether any problem is of autoimmune origin.

### Treatment

- If a person is diagnosed with hypothyroidism, the doctor will generally prescribe a thyroid hormone replacement. There are different strengths of hormone replacement, so finding the right dosage may take some time.
- Treatment for hyperthyroidism is more complex. It usually is treated with anti-thyroid drugs, but if the condition persists, radioactive iodine or surgery may be needed.
- If you do not respond positively to any thyroid hormone treatment, discuss testing for celiac disease with your doctor, as you may be mal-absorbing the medication.

### Hypothyroidism and the Gluten-Free Diet (GFD)

- Some patients with celiac disease have reported a lower need for thyroid hormone replacement after being on the gluten-free diet for a period of time. One reason is that being on a gluten-free diet allows the small intestine to heal, and therefore thyroid medication may be better absorbed. The gluten-free diet may also cause a lower inflammatory response and reduce the inflammation of the thyroid gland.

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Other helpful information is available at [www.GLUTEN.org](http://www.GLUTEN.org).

Advances in celiac disease are fast-paced. If this document is more than 2 years old, please visit our website for updated documents.

This information should not be used to diagnose or treat gluten-related disorders or other medical conditions. For questions about these conditions consult your healthcare team when considering this information.

Please consider your local GIG support group as another resource.

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The Mission of the Gluten Intolerance Group is to empower the gluten-free community through consumer support, advocacy, and education.

To make a donation or become a volunteer to GIG, visit our website or call the office at 253-833-6655.