

A Functional Medicine Approach to Hyperthyroidism

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A lot of articles and blog posts about thyroid disease tend to focus on the signs and symptoms of [hypothyroidism](#), or an underactive thyroid. However, it's [estimated](#) that between 3 and 10 million people actually suffer from an overactive thyroid, or hyperthyroidism. I myself was diagnosed with the autoimmune form of hyperthyroidism called Graves' disease during my second year of medical school. You can listen to my podcast [here](#), where I share my personal experience with Graves' disease and how conventional medicine failed me in that process. I never want anyone to go through what I had to go through to treat my hyperthyroidism, so it is my mission to educate as many people as I can that there is a healthier and more natural way to recover from hyperthyroidism.

What is Hyperthyroidism?

Your thyroid, the butterfly-shaped gland in the front of your neck, [produces hormones](#) to help regulate body temperature, heart rate, growth, energy production, and brain health. Hyperthyroidism is a condition that occurs when the thyroid is overactive and produces too much thyroid hormone. When thyroid hormones are too high, energy metabolism will speed up, causing the body to burn through nutrients too quickly. This can result in malnutrition and lead to a wide range of problems. I personally was eating everything in sight and went from a size 4 to a size 0 in a matter of months. Trust me when I tell you that it was not healthy!

Graves' Disease – Autoimmune Hyperthyroidism

There can be many reasons for the thyroid to be overactive, but this commonly occurs as a result of the [autoimmune condition](#), known as Graves' disease. Normally, thyroid function is regulated by the pituitary gland, a tiny gland responsible for secreting TSH, which signals the thyroid to produce thyroid hormones T3 and T4. In Graves' disease, an antibody known as thyrotropin receptor antibody (TRAb) can mimic pituitary hormones and completely override the system, causing an overactive thyroid. You can also develop Thyroid Peroxidase (TPO) antibodies or Antithyroglobulin antibodies. I personally did not have antibodies to TRAb, I only had antibodies to TPO. I see this very frequently in my clinic as well.

Toxic Multi-Nodular Goiter

Another form of hyperthyroidism is toxic multi-nodular goiter, which involves the growth of independently functioning nodules on the thyroid gland itself. These nodules are able to stimulate the thyroid without the use of TSH, thereby overriding the system and causing an overactive thyroid.

Signs You Have Hyperthyroidism

- Hot flushes, sweating
- Unintentional weight loss
- Frequent stools, loose stool or diarrhea
- Difficulty sleeping and insomnia
- Anxiety, irritability, or constant fatigue
- Elevated heart rate
- Changes in menstrual cycles
- Reduced libido
- Bulging eyes
- Thick red skin on shins or feet
- Increased appetite
- Osteoporosis
- Hand tremors
- Muscle weakness

How is Hyperthyroidism Diagnosed?

Blood testing your thyroid hormone levels is the first step. In hyperthyroidism, the thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) will be very low and the Free T4 and Free T3 will be elevated. In autoimmune conditions, you will see elevated levels of antibodies as well. To read more about optimal thyroid lab values, you can read my article on the thyroid [here](#).

Radioactive iodine uptake (RAIU) is the next step in diagnosing a thyroid imbalance. An RAIU using a small dose

of I-131 will determine how much iodine the thyroid takes up. A high iodine uptake is indicative of Graves' disease. This test can be helpful in ruling out other possible causes of overactive thyroid.

Ultrasound (US) of the thyroid is helpful to look at nodules on the thyroid, and your doctor may request you have a fine needle biopsy to confirm that the nodules are not cancerous.

Conventional Treatment for Hyperthyroidism

Conventional medicine is only focused on treating symptoms, not on getting to the root cause of the disease. Medications, radiation, and surgery only treat the overactive thyroid gland in hopes of reducing symptoms of the disease. In order to truly solve the problem and repair your thyroid and immune system, you must take a [functional medicine approach](#) and find the underlying cause of the imbalance. I personally tried two out of three of these treatments, and it's honestly my only regret in life. Please do not make the same mistake I did.

1. Medications

Propylthiouracil (PTU) is an anti-thyroid drug that interferes with the production of thyroid hormones. Simply google these medications and you will see a long list of dangerous side effects, one being destruction of your liver. I took PTU when I had Graves', and that's exactly what happened to me. I was confined to bedrest until my liver healed, which nearly cost me my life and medical school.

Methamazole is another anti-thyroid drug administered for hyperthyroidism. As a result, this drug can actually cause hypothyroidism, requiring the careful monitoring of TSH and Free T4 levels. Side effects include rash, hair loss, vertigo, jaundice, aplastic anemia, lupus-like syndrome, and hepatitis.

2. Radiation/Ablation

This approach uses a large dose of radioactive iodine (I-131) to permanently destroy thyroid gland cells. After this procedure, you are destined to a life of manufactured thyroid hormone medication. After getting toxic hepatitis from the PTU, I had no other choice but to do this treatment myself. I truly believe that if I had discovered functional medicine sooner, I would have been able to reverse my condition and save my thyroid from destruction as I have done with numerous patients in [my clinic](#).

3. Surgery

When antithyroid medications and radioactive treatments are not viable options, doctors may recommend a partial thyroidectomy, which is when part of the thyroid gland is surgically removed. This is actually the option I recommend as a last resort if someone is not able to reverse their hyperthyroidism using a functional medicine approach.

Underlying Causes of Hyperthyroidism

1. Gluten

Gluten is a huge problem for most people these days because we hybridized it, modified it, and it's in everything! Worst of all it can wreak havoc on your gut and set you up for a leaky gut. Once the gut is leaky, gluten can get into your bloodstream and confuse your immune system. Since the building blocks of gluten share a similar molecular structure with building blocks of your thyroid gland, the immune system can get confused and accidentally attack your thyroid gland. This process is called *molecular mimicry*. You can read all about how gluten contributes to thyroid disease [in this article](#).

2. Leaky gut

In order to absorb nutrients, the gut is somewhat permeable to very small molecules. Many things including, gluten, infections, medications and stress can damage the gut, allowing toxins, microbes and undigested food particles –

among other things – to enter directly into your bloodstream. [Leaky gut](#) is the gateway for these infections, toxins, and foods like gluten to begin causing the systemic inflammation that leads to autoimmunity. You must heal your gut before you can heal yourself.

3. Mercury

Mercury is a heavy metal that is capable of altering or damaging the cells of various bodily tissues. When cells are damaged, your immune system can mistake them as foreign invaders and begin attacking its own organs. [Studies](#) show that individuals with higher mercury exposures have an increased risk of getting an autoimmune thyroid disease.

4. Infections

Infections such as the [herpes family of viruses](#) (HSV) and [Epstein-Barr virus](#) (EBV) have been implicated as a potential cause of autoimmune thyroid disease through inflammation and molecular mimicry.

5. Iodine

Iodine status is a bit controversial. It seems that too little iodine can cause goiter and hypothyroidism and too much can cause hyperthyroidism. When the body detects an increased availability of iodine, this can trigger the thyroid to produce more thyroid hormone. If someone with a relatively low intake of iodine suddenly consumes a very iodine-rich diet, then over time that individual can produce an excessive amount of thyroid hormone, resulting in an overactive thyroid.

The Functional Medicine Approach to Hyperthyroidism

1. Remove gluten from your diet

I recommend that all of my patients remove gluten from their diets because it's simply an inflammatory food. For my patients with autoimmune diseases, like Graves' or Hashimoto's thyroiditis, I highly recommend removing all grains and legumes from the diet as well. These foods contain proteins known as lectins, which act as a natural pesticide for crops and can wreak havoc on the lining of your gut. Changing your diet is the first step in getting well. I created [The Myers Way Comprehensive Elimination Diet eCourse](#) which you can do at home, and it's the foundation that I use with my patients to begin recovering from illnesses.

2. Heal your gut

Healing the gut is essential to healing yourself, as I mentioned before. For this reason, I created [The Myers Way Guide to the Gut eCourse](#) to help guide you through the exact same steps I use with my patients to heal their guts. I also have many articles explaining my [4R approach to healing the gut](#) and [gut-healing supplements](#).

3. Test for heavy metals

We are exposed to heavy metals in a number of different ways: [amalgams](#), fish consumption, and the environment. I recommend having your MTHFR genes tested and doing a DMPS chelation challenge test through a [functional medicine practitioner](#) to determine if mercury or other heavy metals are an issue for you.

4. Find and treat infections

Have your doctor test for infections such as HSV and EBV. Monolaurin from coconut oil can be very effective treatment for both HSV and EBV. [Lysine](#) and a lysine-rich diet is effective at treating HSV infections.

5. Support your immune system

Supplements like vitamin D, omega-3 fish oils, and glutathione are powerful immune modulators, which means that they can help support your immune system. [Vitamin D](#) has been [shown](#) to help regulate the immune system. [Omega 3 fish oils](#) help to reduce inflammation in the entire body. [Glutathione](#) is the most powerful antioxidant in the body which can help reduce inflammation and improve detoxification in the body.

Recommended Supplements for Hyperthyroidism

While you work to address the underlying cause of your thyroid disease, you can ease your symptoms and support your thyroid with supplements and thyroid-calming herbs. Here are the ones I have found to be most helpful.

Thyroid Calming

[This supplement](#) contains three different herbs that naturally regulate your thyroid hormones and reduce hyperthyroid symptoms, including:

- **Bugleweed** – This plant is rich in Lithospermic acid, an organic acid that decreases levels of thyroid stimulating hormones, T4 (the storage form of thyroid hormone) and T3 (the active form). It also prevents thyroid antibodies from binding to your thyroid, which is a huge help to patients with Graves' Disease.
- **Motherwort** – A member of the mint family, this herb alleviates symptoms related to hyperactive thyroid such as heart palpitations, anxiety, sleeplessness, and depressed appetite. Please note that it might cause miscarriage, increase uterine bleeding, and potentially interact badly with many cardiac medications, so be sure to check with your doctor before taking it.
- **Lemon Balm** – This herb is also a member of the mint family and seems to block hormone receptors, preventing TSH from binding to your thyroid tissue and keeping antibodies from attaching to your thyroid. As a result, it helps to calm thyroid symptoms by reducing stress and anxiety, improving sleep and appetite, and easing pain.

The Myers Way® Fiber

This is a very [high-quality fiber supplement](#) that helps with hyperthyroidism, as well as many other health conditions. It includes Glucomannan, a water-soluble fiber that [research has shown](#) to decrease levels of circulating thyroid hormones, including T3 and T4. It also helps bind toxins in your body to help your body flush them out safely.

Because hyperthyroidism causes your body to go into overdrive, you are at a greater risk for developing certain nutritional deficiencies. Here are the supplements I recommend to overcome them.

L-Carnitine

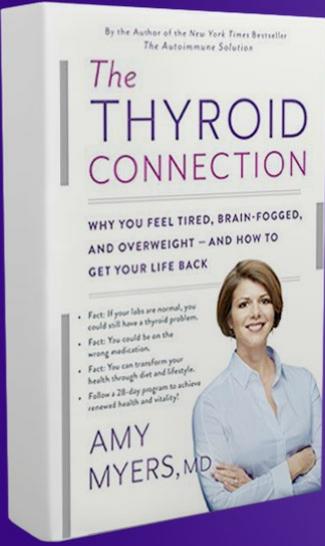
[L-carnitine](#) is an amino acid that helps your body produce energy, and is important for heart and brain function, muscle movement, and other processes. When your thyroid is in hyper mode, you lose L-carnitine through your urine, so you need to replace it. Maintaining enough L-carnitine can help prevent or reverse muscle weakness and other symptoms, possibly by keeping thyroid hormones from getting into the cells of some of your body's tissue. It is also believed to combat insomnia, nervousness, heart palpitations, and tremors.

CoQ10

[CoQ10](#) is found in almost every cell in your body, and serves as a powerful antioxidant that helps you convert food into energy, and protects the integrity of your cells. Studies have linked hyperthyroidism to low levels of CoQ10, so I recommend it for all of my hyperthyroid patients. You will also want to take CoQ10 if you are on any statins or beta blockers, because they block the production of CoQ10.

Restore Thyroid Function & Take Your Health Back

In my new book, [The Thyroid Connection](#), I cover everything you need to know about thyroid disease, including its true underlying causes, how to work with your doctor, how to choose the right medication, and a 28-day program to get your life back.



By the Author of the New York Times Bestseller
The Autoimmune Solution

The THYROID CONNECTION

WHY YOU FEEL TIRED, BRAIN-FOGGED,
AND OVERWEIGHT – AND HOW TO
GET YOUR LIFE BACK

- Fact: If your labs are normal, you could still have a thyroid problem.
- Fact: You could be on the wrong medication.
- Fact: You can transform your health through diet and lifestyle.
- Follow a 28-day program to achieve renewed health and vitality!

AMY MYERS, MD

The THYROID CONNECTION

Why You Feel Tired, Brain-Fogged,
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