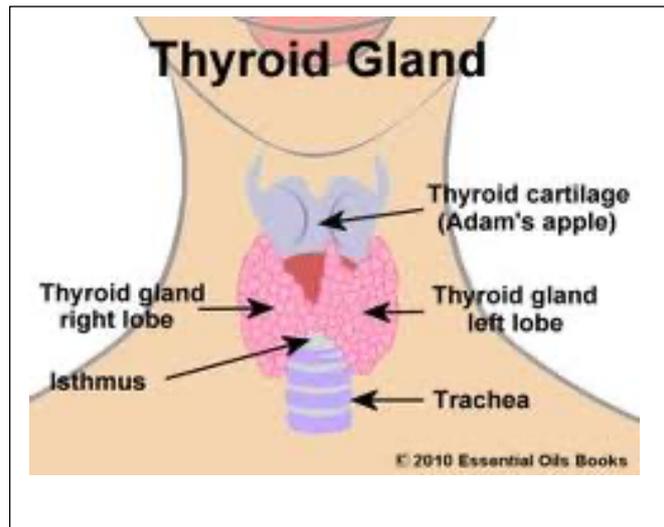


Knowing your Thyroid Gland

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When it comes to health issues you always talk about cholesterol, or how you should remove risk factors causing heart disease and so on, but never think of the importance of your thyroid gland sitting in front of your neck.



It is of the shape of a butterfly or bow, sitting in the lower part of the mid-line just where you wear a bow. You couldn't feel the gland, unless it is swollen or enlarged. You may see the gland on thin necks on stretching the head upwards and backwards. In the old days you would have seen many women with big nodular lumps in the neck and that would be arising from the thyroid gland. People were frightened to get any operation on the neck and preferred to live with it. It is referred to as a nodular goitre. These days you don't see such a picture, other than a minute nodule and for the fear that it could be a cancer would seek early surgical treatment.

Its function is like the fireplace of the old model coal driven train engines. Your strength, your warmth, your ability to have energy to work is all controlled by this little gland.

How do you know that this gland is firing well? After the age of 50, the gland function seems to get weakened-meaning the hormone thyroxine controlling such functions may become less.

If you feel fatigue with exercise intolerance, slower reaction time, weight gain, constipation, sparse, coarse and dry hair in women, you bet your thyroid gland is not firing.

Children may also have the problem and in general they have the same symptoms as adults do, but may also experience poor growth resulting in short stature compared to the other children of the same age, delayed development of permanent teeth and delayed puberty among girls.

Hypothyroid state seems to be less common in men compared to women. The reason been that 80 percent of hypothyroidism is caused by autoimmune disease and they are more common among women.

What is an *auto-immune disease*? It happens when your body's defence system mistakes normal parts of your body, mainly the proteins as foreign invaders and attack them.

This disease is called "Hashimoto's thyroiditis, attacks over 14 million Americans of which about 2 million are men.

When the gland is over-active-meaning more hormones are pumped out the symptom range is different. It is called "Graves' disease or just Hyperthyroidism.

In men the symptoms of hypothyroidism are the same, but in addition feel cold, tires easily, skin become dry, constipation and depression are common, muscles become sore, and a swollen thyroid gland may appear. Loss of interest in sex is an important observation among men.

Hyperthyroidism

Common symptoms are difficulty to concentrate, fatigue, frequent loose bowel movements, tremors of the fingers, heat intolerance and increased appetite but lose weight due to excessive burning of calories.

New studies have revealed that high –normal range, meaning having higher levels of thyroid hormone in the blood stream may be at greater risk of sudden cardiac death, even if those levels are not too high.

This was revealed by Dr Layal Chaker, a research fellow in endocrinology and epidemiology at Erasmus University Medicine Centre Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

By definition cardiac arrest is not angina or chest pain, it is just stoppage of a beating heart.

The doctor further said that the 10 year risk of sudden cardiac death was four times greater among people with higher levels of thyroid hormone.

So, readers of this article should check their thyroid functions whether you have clinical presentation or not. You need to have a blood test called the 'Thyroid Function Tests''

Your doctor will order a T3, T4 and a TSH levels on your blood. TSH stands for thyroxine stimulating hormone secreted by the pituitary gland in the brain. This is the most important parameter in screening for thyroid dysfunction. A raised thyroxine-3 and thyroxine 4 with suppressed TSH confirms the diagnosis of Graves disease.

TSH hormone secretion is raised to stimulate the thyroid gland in situations where T3 and T4 secretions are reduced.

Sick Euthyroid Syndrome

The word 'euthyroid' is used when the gland fires normal levels of the thyroid hormone. During severe illness or starvation the 'firing drive' of the thyroid diminishes. When the health situation returns, the gland begins to function normally.

Conclusions

Get your doctor to do these screening tests when you are 50 and over.

Good advice by Dr Harold