

Is It Midlife or Is It My Thyroid?

Symptoms of both an under- and overactive thyroid are wide ranging and may suggest other health issues.

Maybe you're feeling tired and have more difficulty concentrating—or perhaps you've experienced sleep disturbance, depression, aches and pains, constipation, weight gain, low libido, dry skin, brittle nails, or hair loss. Maybe you're having menstrual or fertility issues. You might conclude that these ailments are due to other health problems, or to simply getting older. But these symptoms—alone or in combination—may be due to low thyroid function, or hypothyroidism. Likewise, symptoms of an overactive thyroid, or hyperthyroidism, are also often subtle—affecting your mood, energy, body temperature, weight, and heart. Classic examples include increased sweating, excessive thirst, nervousness, heart palpitations, hot flashes, and increased appetite.

difficult when other parts of the endocrine system are affected, such as during acute and/or chronic stress or in women during times of hormone fluctuations (e.g., peri-menopause and the postpartum period).

In addition to thyroid function testing, I like to measure levels of other hormones, including estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, cortisol, and DHEA. Because many symptoms of thyroid disease can be due to stress, menstrual problems, or menopause, it's important to take a broader look to determine the best course of action. Hypothyroidism is usually treated with bio-identical thyroid hormone, taken daily. It works exactly like your body's natural thyroid hormone and, once on the right dose, symptoms usually improve dramatically. Whether you've had hypothyroidism or were treated for hyperthyroidism and then became hypothyroid, you'll likely need to take bio-identical thyroid hormone for the rest of your life.

As an integrative practitioner, I also believe that a healthy lifestyle, nutritious diet, stress management, and adequate sleep support a healthy metabolism. Judicious use of nutritional supplements and herbal medicine can also help optimize thyroid health. But wait!! Before you run to the health food store for a basket full of potentially useless or even harmful supplements, see your doctor to be sure that you're getting the correct, safest, and most effective treatment. Remember, diagnosing and treating thyroid disease can be tricky, especially in older people, but doing so can make a big difference in your life.

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Approximately 6% of Americans have thyroid disease. Of these, 80% have low thyroid function and 20% have hyperthyroidism. The risk of developing thyroid disease increases with age and far more women than men are affected. In people over 60, thyroid disease is especially difficult to diagnose. Often called the “great masquerader,” older people with underlying thyroid problems may present to their doctor with depression, atrial fibrillation (a disorganized heart rhythm), or even heart failure. Diagnosing the problem is especially



Elizabeth Pang Fullerton and Sharon Seto

Cameron Silver and Jennie Chiu



Pauline Fong, Marilyn Cabak, and Gerrye Wong

BAY AREA ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION Auxiliary Fashion Show

This year's Bay Area Arthritis Auxiliary Benefit, Fashion Show, and Luncheon featured the collection of couture designer Donald Deal. The event held at the San Francisco Fairmont benefitted the Arthritis Foundation's education, outreach, and research for the two million children and adults living with arthritis in Northern California. Chaired by Sharon Seto, the sold-out gathering included over 400 guests and raised approximately \$250,000.



Karen Kubin, Susan Malott, and Terri Mino



Marilyn Cabak, Lily Shouldice, Delia Ehrlich, and Sharon Seto

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