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Infections Linked to Autoimmune Thyroid Problems

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Hashimoto's thyroiditis or autoimmune destruction of the thyroid gland is the most common cause of hypothyroidism in iodine-sufficient areas of the world. The autoimmune attack on the thyroid gland causes the thyroid to eventually fail as aging occurs. Knowing what is attacking your thyroid gland is vital to preventing ongoing tissue destruction and ultimate failure of the thyroid.

Triggers

There are multiple triggers or causes for autoimmune thyroid problems. [Dysfunctional genes](#) or genetic polymorphisms may be present creating an underlying weak link if other factors are present. Various physical factors may include puberty,

pregnancy, menopause, high levels of [leptin](#), and being female. [Environmental or external causes](#) include excessive iodine intake, [especially iodine salts](#), various pollutants such as tobacco smoke, chlorine, bromide, and fluoride competition, [jet fuel](#) by-products, [plastics](#), (e.g. Bisphenol A, etc), drugs, high levels of stress, selenium deficiency, and various dietary triggers. Dietary triggers include soy, goitrogen foods, gluten intolerance and "gluten associated cross reactive foods." A trigger that is often overlooked is the concern of hidden infections. There are several pathogens described in medical literature related to autoimmune thyroid dysfunction of Hashimoto's and Grave's disease. It is often a forgotten issue.

Clues

There are some powerful clues that can help you and your health care provider determine if infections are causing some of your thyroid concerns. These include:

1. Any history of autoimmune disease
2. Elevated antibodies to viruses or bacteria
3. Chronic fatigue
4. Chronic intermittent fever or fever of unknown origin
5. Chronic swollen lymph nodes
6. Symptoms fluctuate or wax/wane
7. Blood chemistry profiles may show:
 - increase (mild) WBC (acute infections)
 - decreased or low normal WBC (chronic infections)
 - increased lymphocytes
 - increased monocytes
 - decreased neutrophils
 - increased C-Reactive Protein, ESR, and Fibrinogen
 - decreased ferritin
 - low glutathione
 - low vitamin D

H. pylori

[H. pylori](#) (*Helicobacter pylori*) is a common bacteria infecting at least forty percent of the adult population in the United States. Infection rates in other parts of the world may be up to seventy percent or higher. In fact, The Helicobacter Foundation states that the majority of the world population is infected with H pylori. This bacteria is noted for its role in ulcers, gastritis, and GI cancers. H. pylori is more than just a germ in the gut. [Researchers](#) have been investigating the role

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of *H. pylori* in the human body. It is now linked with over one hundred autoimmune diseases. These disorders include rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, MS, and others. Several studies demonstrate that *H. pylori* is linked with [Grave's disease](#) and [Hashimoto's](#). There is debate amongst these studies trying to determine how *H. pylori* fits in, i.e. is it a cause, effect, or simply a by-stander. Regardless of the researchers' debate, multiple studies show positive correlation. It is worthwhile to know if the pathogen is present, simply because it is involved with over 100 autoimmune disorders, it can contribute to the loss of immune tolerance to self. Individuals with thyroid disease often have multiple health concerns present with digestion and other autoimmune concerns. First identify if it is an active or latent infection with accurate testing such as *Helicobacter pylori* stool antigen rather than a blood or breath test that simply tests for exposure. Then make sure that your family members and pets are evaluated since it is easily spread. The presence of *H. pylori* is not always a problem; it depends on the balance of the gut flora to keep it in check. If it is an infection, it must be dealt with.

Hepatitis C Virus

Hepatitis C is another germ that can be troubling to the thyroid. Patients with hepatitis C virus (HCV) frequently have high levels of autoimmune thyroid antibodies, TPO and TgAb, present resulting in thyroid problems. [Chronic autoimmune thyroiditis](#) and subclinical hypothyroidism were significantly more prevalent in HCV patients than healthy individuals or those who had other types of hepatitis. Research shows a higher prevalence and risk for autoimmune thyroiditis and papillary thyroid cancer when infected with HCV especially when genetic polymorphisms are present. If you have a history of hepatitis C and still feel exhausted and out of sorts, check your thyroid for autoimmune antibodies.

HTLV

HTLV or Human T lymphotropic virus type 1 (HTLV-1) is a retrovirus infecting humans. In most individuals, the [viral infection](#) remains undetected and does not cause obvious harm. However, in about 4-9% of patients who have this virus, it can cause devastating effects. It can cause HTLV-1 associated Hashimoto's thyroiditis and Grave's disease along with other disorders such as HTLV-1 associated conjunctivitis (eye inflammation), SICCA syndrome (dry eyes, mouth, nose, etc.), Sjogrens, dermatitis, myositis (muscle inflammation), arthritis, and others.

Epstein Barr

Epstein Barr virus (EBV) is another virus often lying dormant without immune system distress in many but may be chronically active in others. In some individuals, it is like a [sleeping giant](#) waiting for the golden opportunity of immune imbalances to activate and attack. [Researchers](#) studied a small group of children ages 7-12 who were diagnosed with autoimmune thyroid disease to see if there was the presence of EBV, Herpes Simplex Virus and cytomegalovirus. They discovered that lab values for EBV IgG were positive in children who had autoimmune thyroid disease and were hypothyroid. The other two pathogens were not an issue. The study confirmed a definite correlation with the EBV and poor thyroid function.

In a study nearly 20 years ago, [researchers](#) demonstrated EBV contributed to the development of thyroid cancer from the initial Hashimoto's thyroiditis. The results "suggested that EBV may participate in the malignant transformation from Hashimoto's thyroiditis to malignant lymphoma of the thyroid." This does not mean that EBV causes the development of Hashimoto's and subsequent thyroid cancer development in every person. It does mean that the triggers should be identified and removed when possible. Take off the straw that broke the camel's back to prevent further destruction.

Other Viruses

[Studies](#) published on the topic of viruses and autoimmune thyroid are mixed. There is a frequent consensus that more studies are needed to clarify the relationship between viruses and thyroid disease. Evidence does point to the presence of viruses with various thyroid problems. Subacute thyroiditis is associated with retrovirus (HFV) and mumps. Grave's disease is associated with retroviruses HTLV-1, HFV, HIV, and SV40. Hashimoto's thyroiditis is linked with HTLV-1, enterovirus, rubella, mumps, herpes simplex, EBV, and the parvovirus.

Researchers are unsure if the viruses are responsible for the thyroid disease or just innocent bystanders. Ongoing research is occurring on this topic. It is known that there is a breakdown of tolerance to self caused by physical, environmental and genetic dysfunction that leads to autoimmune inflammation and tissue destruction. In this case, the thyroid is being attacked and subsequently destroyed.

Immune Cross Reactivity and Mimicry

Nearly 20 years ago biochemist and immunologist [A. Vojdani](#) wrote about the connection of immunological cross reactivity between *Candida albicans* and human tissue. He studied how



molecules could mimic one another causing confusion of the immune system. This caused the immune system to think that it was attacking the “bad guy” when in reality it was attacking a tissue that was quite similar but not a “bad guy.” It caused a kind of cloak and dagger response. The study demonstrated that *Candida albicans* could trigger the immune system to attack almost any tissue, including the thyroid, through molecular mimicry. This concept could potentially explain what other researchers are seeing with other germs and autoimmune diseases including thyroid. It is a concept that is being heavily developed with more information coming soon. It also provides a deeper meaning to the relationship of [thyroid problems](#), celiac disease and candida concerns.

Tips for Supporting a Healthy Thyroid and Immune System

One of the first places to start is to ensure that your gut flora is healthy. Over seventy percent of your immune system is in your digestive tract. In fact, many autoimmune diseases such as type 1 diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and others are linked with alterations in the intestinal bacteria that trigger an autoimmune attack on whatever tissues are most susceptible. [Research](#) published this month showed that in hyperthyroidism, there were obvious decreases in the beneficial bacteria *Bifidobacterium* and *Lactobacillus*, and increase of non-beneficial *Enterococcus*. There are also [problems](#) with increased gut permeability just starting to be identified with autoimmune thyroid concerns.

Fundamental to the immune system is glutathione. Without adequate glutathione, the immune system fatigues, struggles, and cannot fight germs, aberrant cells, detoxify or maintain its antioxidant status. Glutathione production and recycling is supported by NAC, whey protein, vitamins B2, B6, B12, C, and E, folate, selenium, glutamine, lipoic acid, silymarin, exercise, and sulfur rich foods (onions, garlic, and cruciferous vegetables).

Check your vitamin D levels. Optimal lab values range from 50-80ng/mL. Vitamin D turns on/off over 1200 gene signals in an appropriate manner.

Consume antiviral foods such as coconut oil, garlic, and onion. Excessive arginine can stimulate the herpes family viral activity if it is out of balance with the amino acid lysine. Reduce intake of foods or supplements high in arginine. Foods rich in arginine include chocolate, egg white, gelatin, nuts, peanuts/peanut butter, pumpkin seeds, roast beef, sesame seeds, tofu, white fish, some grains, and some vegetables.

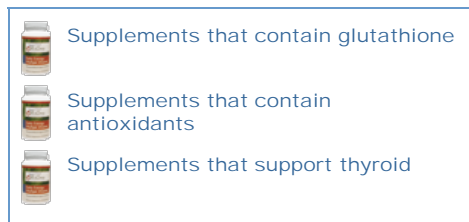
Consider increasing foods rich in lysine such as dairy, chicken, pork, lamb, beef, turkey, and other poultry if your amino acid balance is skewed. Try to have either equal amounts or slightly higher lysine intake if dealing with any herpes viral activity. This includes EBV activity.

Avoid sugar as it suppresses white blood cells and the immune system function for up to 6 hours after consumption.

Keep body pH alkaline. Magnesium, calcium, and chlorella are nutrients that help buffer acid pH. Baking soda, Epsom salt/mineral salt baths, and diets rich in most veggies and fruits also help alkalinizing the body. Chronic infections thrive in acidic, poorly oxygenated tissues.

Consider using nutritional support such as fermented foods and probiotics, [monolaurin](#), noni, olive leaf extract, vitamin C, lemon balm, arabinogalactan, zinc, oregano oil, or colloidal silver to help support healthy germ balances.

Complete thyroid destruction does not have to happen, but it takes work to identify and remove the triggers. It takes even more work to get the body back in balance to allow health to return. Don't ignore symptoms or resign yourself to having to take thyroid medication for the rest of your life just because you saw your family members do it. Take charge of your health. Start fighting for it and delve deeper.



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