

# 3 ways to tackle... thyroid issues



Stop an underactive thyroid wreaking havoc on your health, says **Louise Pyne**

**T**he thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland in the neck that produces hormones that are vital for regulation of the body's metabolism (the rate at which your body burns energy). The most important of these hormones are T3 and T4, also known as thyroxine. Low levels of these hormones can cause hypothyroidism, a condition that one in 20 Brits is thought to suffer from. An underactive thyroid gland

often causes symptoms such as intolerance to cold temperatures, fatigue, weight gain, depression and insomnia. But occasionally there are no indicators at all, which often leads to misdiagnosis.

For those who suffer from hypothyroidism, there are many ways to help minimise the symptoms. These can be both integrated into orthodox medical treatment or used alone - depending on the severity of the condition.

## Diet management

**Alison Clark**, registered dietitian and independent nutritionist



**What?** A good diet can tackle one of the main complaints of hypothyroidism: weight gain. Ensuring your thyroid hormone levels are well regulated will curb the symptoms of

fatigue, weight gain and depression, which will help you to focus on your weight loss.

**The treatment:** An effective diet will be well balanced in terms of the five food groups. Base your diet on the two major food groups: fruit and vegetables and starchy carbohydrates, always going for wholemeal or wholegrain options. A wholegrain food generally has more nutrients (especially vitamin E and phytochemicals) than its white counterpart.

**The benefits:** Following a healthy, balanced diet offers your body the energy and nutrients it needs to function. Avoiding foods high in fat and sugar and exercising sensible portion control will also help with weight management. Building in fitness sessions of up to 30 minutes per day will help, too.

**Essential advice:** Iodine plays a major role in the overall function of the thyroid and its production of thyroid hormones. Foods rich in iodine consumed in proper amounts will contribute to good thyroid health. Seafood is one of the best natural sources of iodine and the Food Standards Agency recommends we eat two portions of fish per week - one of which should be oily (e.g. trout, salmon, fresh tuna or mackerel).

**For more info:** [www.achn.co.uk](http://www.achn.co.uk)

## Reflexology

**Cheli Mula**, reflexologist at the Feelgood Centre in London

**What?** Reflexology is a complementary therapy where parts of the foot correspond to the body, nervous system and organs. The thyroid can be stimulated by applying acupressure to certain parts of the foot. The process

enhances the energy and rejuvenation of the body, while achieving total relaxation.

**The treatment:** A typical reflexology session starts by discussing the client's health history to identify problem areas. The therapist then analyses tissue and skin condition before beginning to manipulate the joints and stimulating certain acupressure points in the foot. In reflexology, the thyroid is represented by the area around the big toe. To treat the thyroid you also need to treat the neck and large intestine, which are located around the big toe and at the heel of the foot. Acute issues can be treated by a course of 10 treatments spread over a period of six weeks.

**Essential advice:** Reflexology is a powerful technique - sweating, feeling cold, extreme tiredness and spontaneous emotional reactions may occur, but these reactions are signs that the therapy has been successful. If the reactions are too severe, the length of the therapy might be reassessed.

**For more info:** A single session with Cheli costs £45, but *Women's Fitness* readers will receive a 10 per cent discount on their first treatment. For bookings or more information, call **07789 567 612**.

## Chinese Herbal Medicine

**Katherine Gao**, qualified practitioner of Chinese herbal medicine



**What?** Chinese herbal medicine is helpful for sufferers of hypothyroidism as it promotes balance within the body's hormonal system. Some patients have found that, after trying conventional treatments, Chinese

herbal medicine has worked for them.

**The treatment:** The practitioner will look at the patient's recent medical history; extreme stress, a poor diet or an unhealthy lifestyle can lead to low thyroid hormone levels. Often a cold or the flu can trigger an autoimmune reaction that kills the tissue in the thyroid gland. Depending on the patient's specific needs, herbs will then be prescribed to improve circulation, reduce inflammation, adjust the immune response, help metabolism and enable the patient to deal with stress.

**The benefits:** Chinese herbal treatment is likely to leave you feeling energised and will help you to be better motivated. It can also help with weight loss and can even give fertility levels a boost.

**Essential advice:** Any reputable practitioner will find out which orthodox medication the patient is taking for their condition, so any possible interactions can be identified and the most appropriate herbs can be prescribed.

**For more info:** To find a qualified practitioner near you, see The Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine's website at [www.rchm.co.uk](http://www.rchm.co.uk)

\* For information and further advice on hypothyroidism, see [www.btf-thyroid.org](http://www.btf-thyroid.org)