



# Celiac Disease and Thyroid Conditions

GIG Education Bulletin

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## Celiac Disease and Thyroid Disease: The Connection

Researchers have found autoimmune thyroid diseases to be more common in people with CD than in the general population.

The reasons for this relationship are not clear, but these are the facts we do know:

- It is likely CD and thyroid disease will occur together because they are both common autoimmune diseases.
- There is evidence CD may predispose individuals to develop other autoimmune diseases, such as thyroid disease.
- Thyroid disease is often diagnosed before CD; physicians may test for thyroid disease more than CD because it is so common.

## What does the thyroid gland do?

Your thyroid is a small gland just below your Adam’s apple. This gland produces thyroid hormones, hormones whose main job is to regulate metabolism. These hormones affect every system in our body and help to control its functions, for example temperature regulation.

## Thyroid Disease

If your thyroid gland stops producing adequate amounts of hormones it causes your whole body to slow down. This is called **hypothyroidism**. If your thyroid begins to over-produce hormones it causes your metabolism to significantly increase. This is called **hyperthyroidism**. Hashimoto’s disease and Grave’s Disease are two common causes of **hypothyroidism** and **hyperthyroidism** (respectively). Both are autoimmune diseases: autoimmune disease basically means your body’s immune system is attacking its own tissues.

## Grave’s Disease

- Your body’s immune system attacks the thyroid and causes it to produce too many thyroid hormones (**hyperthyroidism**).
- **Hyperthyroidism** is not as common as **hypothyroidism**.
- Common Symptoms:

- |                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| Weight loss      | Insomnia           |
| Rapid pulse      | Irritability       |
| Protruding eyes  | Heart Palpitations |
| Feeling too warm | Diarrhea           |
| Nervousness      | Muscle Weakness    |

## Questions to Ask your Doctor:

*What is the proper treatment for my thyroid condition?*

*Are the thyroid medications gluten-free?*

*How long does this treatment take, and are there any side effects?*

*How soon should my symptoms start improving with thyroid therapy?*

*What kinds of foods or other medications may decrease the absorption of thyroid medication?*

*How often do I need to get a blood test to measure my thyroid levels?*

*Are there any other things I should be aware of with this condition or when I’m on thyroid therapy?*

*Should I take nutritional supplements?*

## Hashimoto's Disease (Also called Chronic Lymphocytic Thyroiditis)

- Your body's immune system attacks the thyroid which causes a decrease in production of thyroid hormone (**hypothyroidism**).
- You may have **hypothyroidism** and not experience any symptoms for years until your body becomes over-stressed, i.e. after a pregnancy or a traumatic illness.
- Symptoms can be very subtle and nonspecific, mimicking other illness, so it is important to get a TSH thyroid test if you experience any of the following symptoms:

Tiredness	Dizziness
Weight gain	Depression
Dry skin	Muscle cramps
Often feeling cold and low body temperature	Constipation
Coarse, dry hair or hair loss	Decreased concentration or difficulty remembering things
Enlarged thyroid gland in the neck	Slowed heartbeat
High cholesterol	Yellowish skin
	Nausea
	Lack of coordination

## Testing for Thyroid Function

- It is recommended that people have their TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) measured once a year. This is currently the best screening test for thyroid function. After receiving a patient's results, doctors may want to do more specific thyroid tests to determine whether the problem is of autoimmune origin.
- If a person is diagnosed with **hypothyroidism**, the doctor will prescribe a thyroid hormone replacement. There are different strengths of hormone replacement, so finding the right dosage may take some time.
- Treatment for **hyperthyroidism** is more complex. It usually is treated with antithyroid drugs, but if the condition persists radioactive iodine or surgery may be needed.
- If you do not respond positively to any thyroid hormone treatment, discuss testing for CD with your doctor, as you may be malabsorbing the medication.

## Hypothyroidism and the Gluten-Free Diet (GF)

- Some patients with CD have reported a lowered need for thyroid hormone replacement after being on the GF diet for a period of time.
- What is the reason for this? One reason is that the GF diet allows the small intestine to heal, and therefore thyroid medication may be better absorbed. The GF diet may also cause a lower inflammatory response and reduce the inflammation of the thyroid gland.

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*This information should not be used to diagnose or treat thyroid or celiac disease. See your health care team for diagnosis and treatment options specifically for you.*

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