ask our experts


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Professionals answer your questions about natural medicine

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"Due to Canada's low exposure to sunlight, approximately 20 to 25 percent of women and about 10 percent of men are affected of low thyroid hormone"

Low thyroid

I have all the symptoms of low thyroid but my doctor says my thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) test is normal. Is there anything natural I can use?

Lorna Vanderhaeghe, BSc: The thyroid secretes two hormones T3 and T4 that are crucial for controlling our metabolism. Because they affect every cell in the body, a deficiency will result in many symptoms, including thinning hair, loss of eyebrows, dry or thickened skin, weight gain or difficulty losing weight, sensitivity to cold, menstrual problems, night sweats, fatigue or lethargy, and more.

Hypothyroid or low thyroid hormone is very common in Canada due to our low exposure to sunlight, with approximately 20 to 25 percent of women and about 10
percent of men affected. An additional 20 percent may also have mild hypothyroidism whereby their TSH is within normal range yet they have low thyroid symptoms.

Severe hypothyroidism, confirmed by a thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) test, requires the use of thyroid medication. If you have mild or low thyroid, or if you have been on thyroid medication for a while and still have symptoms, you may not be converting your thyroid hormones very well and nutritional support may be all you need.

Try the herbs ashwagandha and commiphora mukul, which work together to help improve thyroid activity (ashwagandha increases the level of T4 thyroid hormone while commiphora enhances the conversion of T4 to the more potent T3 form), taking 150mg of ashwagandha and 100 mg of commiphora mukul daily.

Add between 400 and 800 IU of vitamin D, which is necessary for the manufacturing of thyroid hormone. Include 500 mg of tyrosine, an amino acid found in protein. And, because we are now reducing our use of salt, which contains iodine and supports proper thyroid health, supplement with 100 mcg of potassium iodide.

Combined, these nutrients work well to support thyroid health.

Weaning baby off breast milk

Q I have a young breastfed baby whom I want to wean after his first birthday. What sort of milk should I start him on?

A Joey Shulman, DC, RNCP: First of all, let me congratulate you on breast feeding for a solid year. You have given your infant’s immune system a wonderful start in life. A mother’s milk passes on protective antibodies to a baby’s delicate system, setting the stage for long-lasting immunity. In addition to a multitude of antibodies, breast-fed babies also have been shown to have higher IQs, fewer allergies, and fewer respiratory and ear infections.

I am not an advocate of introducing a large amount of cow’s milk until after the age of two. Cow’s milk is considerably more protein dense than human milk. In fact, cow’s milk derives 15 percent of its calories from protein, whereas human milk derives approximately five percent. Undigested protein molecules such as casein found in cow’s milk are difficult for a child’s digestive system to assimilate and often result in allergic reactions such as inflammation, asthma, eczema, and bronchial and ear infections. When starting your baby on dairy products, try a high-quality, more absorbable option such as kefir or yogurt supplemented with probiotics.

Another option, soy milk, may lead to allergic reactions as children with allergic responses to dairy also react to soy. Rice milk may be non-allergenic, but it is not a good protein source. If you are switching your child to rice milk, ensure they have other high-quality protein sources in their diet.

After the age of one year, your child will be eating a variety of foods. Although milk of any kind is soothing to your baby, other high-quality foods such as mashed organic fruits and vegetables, essential fats, and lean proteins should be included in his diet daily.