

Module 5 Lesson 2

Transcript

Today, we're going to dive into the breakdown of thyroid testing numbers so that when your client says, "My TSH was high," you immediately don't think, "What does that stand for?" Or rush to Google to refresh yourself on it. I'm hoping this lesson will bump up your confidence and help you help your community and peeps understand what their numbers have to do with their wellness. I'm really practiced with unusual thyroid-related labs. I see so many, and they're so well-studied and treated that I usually just say to my clients, "Did you have a followup on your TSH," and I will either hear, "Yes, the next test came back normal," or, "My endocrinologist started me on Levothyl." In this lesson, you'll learn the significance of these thyroid hormones, and you'll understand thyroid hormone lab values, and why they are important. There's not a lot of ambiguity with thyroid testing and lab values, so unlike some conditions you can't kind of have Hashimoto's disease.

That said, there can be a degree of severity in some cases where a person can be mildly hypo or hyperthyroid. My point being here, that diagnosing here is pretty straightforward, and well-researched, and well understood. Not everything in the world of nutrition is like that. Something else you need to know if you're creating a lifestyle plan for somebody, most thyroid meds are taken first thing in the morning on an empty stomach, and then, you have to wait 30 minutes before you eat. Some people also may experience nausea. These meds, maybe you've heard of Synthroid or levothyroxine, today, have virtually no side effects and work great. I always reassure clients that they don't need to feel like they failed or like they did something wrong or that they're sick if their bodies do not maintain their thyroid naturally. In follow-up visits, their endocrinologist is going to see normal T3, T4, and TSH or tweak their dosages until the values are normal.

So, let's take a peak at these values that we're talking about. Thyroid values aren't as straightforward as say, blood pressure. For example, we might know, oops, blood pressure is 150 over 90, you're hypertensive. With thyroid labs, we're looking at three things: TSH, T3, and T4. Sometimes, one or two labs are totally normal, and the other is abnormal. Each of the different thyroid levels measured are linked to different illnesses and disorders, which I will get into in later lessons. And then sometimes, because thyroid hormones are always shifting and are super influenced by other things such as diets, sleep, hydration, time of day, and whatnot, you get a false lab, and everything is actually totally normal. There was just a blip that turns out to be nothing, and with some extra tests, you confirm that. It's always important to reassure your clients that scary numbers that are unusual really may be a fluke and that they shouldn't add stress or worry about it because it may not be anything concerning at all.

As a practitioner, it's your job to remain calm about the situation. And if a client does freak out about lab values, clearly lay out options and next steps. More on that later. I said before that diagnosing thyroid disease is pretty accurate, but sometimes it does take extra lab tests and repeat tests to get the most accurate picture. Remind your clients that they might need to be doing that. Check out the handout included in this module that goes in depth into TSH, T3, T4, and goitrogens, all things that are thyroid related and it will deepen your understanding of this material. I'm hearing about a lot of extra testing that people are doing for their thyroids, and I know there are even home kits out there and fancy labs that tell you super detailed information. I really think this is one area that is really best left to a good endocrinologist to meter out and diagnose.

Sometimes, too much information is stressful rather than stress-relieving, and I always recommend a professional at their craft to do the diagnosing. Where you come in is that your clients are going to come to you and ask if there are any changes they can make to their diet or lifestyle to improve their lab values. And the answer is, unfortunately, pretty much no. There is no such thing as a concrete thyroid diet, but we can double-check a few things. First, it's really, really hard to live in the US and not have iodine in our diet. Iodine is found in salt and most of us, we take in way too much salt. Still check in with your clients. If they cook most of their own foods, eat minimally packaged, processed foods, and use fancy Himalayan sea salt, which isn't iodized, well then, make sure they're sprinkling a little bit of iodized salt into their diet or bump up their intake of shrimp, seaweed, or fish.

Second, recommend dark green leafy vegetables and foods full of magnesium. They will support the thyroid greatly. So some great choices of greens, which I'm sure you all love: spinach, salad greens, and Swiss chard. Okay. Onto my third point, recommend a few nuts to a full serving a day to support thyroid health. You know I love nuts for everyone, really. They're rich in selenium and iron, which promote thyroid health. Also, exercise is great for the thyroid and can promote its health. Even though your clients may feel sluggish or less eager to go for that endorphin rush, encouraging them to move is really critical.

So to summarize, the key takeaways from this lesson. Thyroid stimulating hormone, TSH is made in the pituitary gland, and TSH lab values can indicate whether or not there is an issue with a client's thyroid. If you suspect a thyroid issue in a client, start by recommending these basic lab values we touched on. If something comes back abnormal, it's good practice to recommend a retest as thyroid hormone levels are constantly shifting. If an abnormal level is confirmed, double-check a few things in the diet. While it may be tempting to dig further into other thyroid tests, I recommend

referring the client to a great endocrinologist at this point to keep within your scope of practice and ensure the client is getting the best possible care. I'll see you in the next lesson.