

Module 5, Lesson 1 Handout:

Thyroid Diseases & Statistics Cheat Sheet

The thyroid is a gland found in your neck that regulates a variety of important functions, but it's main role in the endocrine system is to regulate metabolism. It does this by secreting the hormones T3 (triiodothyronine) and T4 (thyroxine), when stimulated by another hormone released from the pituitary gland called TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone).

Iodine is a key player here. Iodine deficiency is the most common cause of hypothyroidism worldwide. One-third of the world's population lives in iodine deficient areas. While an iodine deficiency is rare in the U.S. and developed countries, it's important to know that too much iodine can actually be harmful and cause overproduction of thyroid hormones. This may lead to an enlarged and inflamed thyroid gland or thyroid cancer.

Thyroid issues are common, and may be the reason some of your clients experience trouble losing weight and have low energy levels. They can affect anyone. The most common thyroid diseases are hyperthyroidism, hypothyroidism, graves' diseases and hashimoto's disease. Below is a brief overview of these diseases and some quick facts and statistics on the prevalence of thyroid disorders.

Thyroid Diseases

Hyperthyroidism means the thyroid gland is overstimulated, producing too much T4 which can lead to weight loss, hyperactivity, irritability, rapid heartbeat and sweating. This disease is associated with a faster metabolism.

Hypothyroidism means the thyroid gland is producing too little T4 which can lead to weight gain, fatigue, sensitivity to cold, depression and dry skin. This disease is associated with a slower metabolism.

Graves' disease is an autoimmune disorder that causes hyperthyroidism and the associated symptoms like weight loss, irritability and heat sensitivity or sweating.

Hashimoto's disease is an autoimmune disorder that causes hypothyroidism and the associated symptoms like weight gain, fatigue and cold sensitivity.

Facts & Statistics

American Thyroid Association (ATA)

- More than 12% of the U.S. population will develop a thyroid condition during their lifetime. This translates to 20 million Americans
- 60% of people with thyroid disease are undiagnosed
- Thyroid disease can increase health risks such as infertility, osteoporosis and heart disease
- Women are 5 to 8 times more likely to have thyroid disease than men
- 1 out of 8 women will develop a thyroid disorder during her lifetime
- Researchers do not have answers as to why thyroid disorders are becoming so prevalent, but they're zeroing in on many factors, such as diet, environment and environmental chemicals and lifestyle
- Most thyroid diseases are life-long conditions that can be managed with medical attention
- Most thyroid issues are going to need medications and doctor's supervision to be managed

Since thyroid issues are so common, it's likely that your clients may come to you with complaints or worries about unexpected weight gain or weight loss and feeling more sensitive to heat or fatigue. These symptoms should not be overlooked, especially in your female clients who are more susceptible to thyroid diseases - but remember, thyroid diseases do not discriminate. The best thing you can do as your clients' health care practitioner is to suggest they get a thyroid check up and work with their endocrinologist or other doctor to manage their condition. It's a team effort so you won't be alone here. Your clients will be grateful you have this knowledge since so many cases go undiagnosed and people are left stumped by the sudden changes in their body.