SAVE MY Thyroid PROJECT

Thyroid/Immune Action Points

CHECKLIST

By Dr. Eric Osansky

The goal of this checklist is to provide you with action points to make you aware of potential triggers and underlying imbalances so you can regain your thyroid and immune system health!

1. ELIMINATE FOOD TRIGGERS.

The three main food triggers are gluten, dairy, and corn. This isn't to suggest that other foods can't be problematic, but these are 3 of the main foods you will want to eliminate when trying to restore your thyroid/immune health. Of these three, gluten is the most common allergen that natural healthcare practitioners recommend for their patients to avoid. There are a few reasons for this.

Besides gluten being a common allergen, the gluten proteins of wheat, rye, and barley can't be completely broken down by human digestive enzymes. In addition, the research shows that gluten causes a leaky gut in EVERYONE, and a leaky gut is a factor in autoimmune conditions such as Graves' disease and Hashimoto's. Some people will argue that they have no symptoms when consuming gluten, and the truth is that some people might be able to get away with eating gluten, but you also need to keep in mind that not everyone who has a gluten sensitivity will experience symptoms when consuming gluten. At the very least I would encourage you to avoid gluten for a minimum of 30 days, although avoiding it completely while restoring your health would be even better.

Dairy is another common allergen. While someone can have a direct sensitivity to dairy, it also is possible for one or more of the dairy proteins to cross-react with gluten. While some people do fine with raw dairy or other forms of dairy such as ghee, everyone is different, and some people do react to these healthier forms of dairy products. I'm not asking you to give up dairy forever (although some people will need to do this), but try to avoid it while restoring your health.

Corn is yet another common allergen, and one that cross-reacts with gluten. Research has shown that the proteins from corn can cause a celiac-like immune response due to similar or alternative pathogenic mechanisms to the proteins found in wheat. In other words, eating corn can cause a similar response as gluten.

2. DON'T FOCUS ON DIET ALONE.

I know that this might seem to contradict the first point on this checklist, but I think it's important to let you know that while some people experience a dramatic improvement in their thyroid health upon removing common food triggers, others won't notice any positive changes. Or some might experience some improvement, but still experience symptoms and/or positive tests (i.e. elevated thyroid antibodies). Since those reading this have Graves' disease or Hashimoto's thyroiditis, I want to briefly mention the triad of autoimmunity. According to the triad of autoimmunity, in order for autoimmunity to develop you need 1) a genetic predisposition, 2) an environmental trigger, and 3) an increase in intestinal permeability (a leaky gut). As you know, we can't change your genes, but we can reverse autoimmunity by removing the trigger and healing the gut.

Focusing on the environmental triggers, there are four main categories of these triggers:

1. Food
2. Stress
3. Chemicals
4. Infections

As you can see, one of the main categories is food. So it is possible that food can be a trigger, and if a specific food is the sole trigger, then eliminating this food from one's diet can reverse the autoimmune component. As for how to know if food is your only trigger, in my opinion, the best way to find out is through an elimination and reintroduction diet. If you avoid all of the allergenic foods (gluten, dairy, corn, etc.) and your symptoms resolve and your thyroid panel and antibodies normalize, then you know that food was the main culprit. On the other hand, if your symptoms don't improve and/or your blood tests don't normalize, then there are most likely other triggers present.

3. BE AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF GLYPHOSATE.

Glyphosate is the active ingredient in the herbicide Roundup. It is mainly used on genetically modified crops, and it's one of the main reasons for the increased prevalence of different types of health conditions, including thyroid and autoimmune thyroid conditions. One of the main reasons for this is because it can disrupt the gut microbiome. Glyphosate does this by disrupting the shikimate pathway of our gut bacteria through the inhibition of 5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase. So just to summarize, eating foods with glyphosate can cause an imbalance of the gut microbiome, setting the stage for chronic health conditions...especially autoimmune thyroid conditions such as Graves' disease and Hashimoto's.

It's also important to mention how glyphosate can inhibit cytochrome P450 enzymes. These enzymes play an important role in detoxification, as well as the production of bile acids. Glyphosate can also cause mineral deficiencies, as studies show that it can chelate copper, zinc, iron, calcium, magnesium, and manganese. So how do you avoid glyphosate? In this day and age pretty much everybody has glyphosate in their body, which can be confirmed through a urine test. But while testing is an option, you probably should just assume you have glyphosate in your tissues, and do what you can do minimize your exposure. The best way to do this is by minimizing your exposure to processed or refined foods, and to try to eat as many certified organic foods as possible.

As I mentioned in point #1, many healthcare professionals recommend that people with thyroid autoimmunity avoid gluten, which makes sense since gluten has been shown to cause a leaky gut in everyone. However, some non-GMO crops are sprayed with glyphosate right before they are harvested, including wheat and other grains. Thus, some speculate that many people don't necessary have a problem with gluten but, instead, have a problem with wheat and other grains due to the glyphosate.

It’s common to hear stories about people who have problems eating wheat in the United States, but who have no problem eating wheat in other countries where glyphosate isn’t sprayed on the crops. Hybridization of wheat is also something to consider, but perhaps glyphosate is the primary culprit. The truth is that I don’t know if the widespread spraying of crops with glyphosate is the main reason why gluten is a problem in so many people.

4. BECOME AN EXPERT IN MANAGING YOUR STRESS.

Chronic stress is a trigger that is overlooked by many people. This poses a problem, since most people deal with chronic stress daily. But how does stress specifically lead to a condition such as Graves' disease or Hashimoto's thyroiditis? Stress suppresses the immune system, and, therefore, can make someone more susceptible to infections and even conditions such as cancer. Stress can also exacerbate the autoimmune response. So, how can stress suppress the immune system, yet exacerbate autoimmunity? Well, chronic or long-term stress can suppress immunity by decreasing immune cell numbers and function and/or increasing immunosuppressive mechanisms, such as regulatory T cells. However, chronic stress can also dysregulate immune function by increasing the production of both type-1 and type-2 cytokines.

While some people reading this are doing a great job of managing their stress through meditation, yoga, or other mind-body medicine (MBM) techniques, many people don't do a good job in this area. Although most of the evidence for MBM relates to helping with stress, evidence also shows that MBM can help to modulate immune system function. This doesn't mean that MBM techniques alone can reverse your autoimmune thyroid condition.

So how can you incorporate MBM into your routine? First of all, you need to choose one or more MBM techniques. If you already have experience incorporating a specific MBM technique (e.g., meditation), and if you enjoy this technique, then, of course, it makes sense to continue doing it. Of course you need to block out time to incorporate it, and while this can be challenging for many people, even if you can only start with five minutes per day this will be beneficial. Just make sure you do some type of MBM technique EVERY day.

5. DON'T OVERTRAIN.

Most people understand that regular exercise is important for optimal health. While I'm sure many people reading this are already following a regular exercise routine, other people rarely exercise. Some people live a sedentary lifestyle not because they choose to do this, but perhaps they don't have the energy to exercise. Those with hyperthyroidism/Graves' disease might be concerned about exercise putting too much stress on their heart.

Overall, regular exercise seems to have a healthy effect on the immune system, as regular aerobic exercise appears to be associated with a reduction in chronic inflammation. However, is there a risk of overtraining? Although no studies confirm that excessive exercise causes thyroid autoimmunity, without question, overtraining does have a negative effect on the health of the immune system by increasing proinflammatory cytokines, which play a role in different autoimmune conditions, including Graves' disease and Hashimoto's. In addition, overexercising can decrease secretory IgA, which serves as a form of protection, binding to antigens such as bacteria. Thus, low secretory IgA levels can make someone more susceptible to developing an infection, which can be a potential trigger.

The question you might have at this point is "How much exercise is considered to be too much?" Well, further research is still needed in this area, but if you engage in continuous aerobic activity, then you should be able to hold a conversation while exercising. Most people with Graves' disease and Hashimoto's should avoid engaging in high-intensity interval training until their adrenals and immune system health improves. In most cases, it's fine to do some light resistance training, and this really can benefit those with hyperthyroidism since elevated thyroid hormone levels can have a negative effect on muscle mass and bone density.

6. IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF YOUR GUT MICROBIOME/HEAL YOUR GUT.

The microbiome is composed of bacteria, archaea, viruses, and eukaryotic microbes that reside in and on our bodies, and these microbes can have a profound impact on our physiology. Healthy adult humans each typically harbor more than 1,000 species of bacteria, and the microbiota of the gut is more diverse when compared to other areas of the body. Unfortunately, many people have their gut microbiota disrupted by eating a poor diet, being exposed to environmental toxins, and/or taking certain medications, most notably antibiotics. While these factors can also lead to an increase in intestinal permeability (a leaky gut), having a disrupted microbiome can also be a factor in autoimmune conditions such as Graves' disease and Hashimoto's.

Speaking of a leaky gut, there is evidence that all autoimmune conditions involve a disruption of the intestinal barrier. In other words, you can't have an autoimmune condition such Graves' disease or Hashimoto's without having a leaky gut. But what if you're not experiencing any gut symptoms? It's important to understand that just because someone lacks gastrointestinal symptoms (i.e., stomach pain, gas, bloating) doesn't confirm that their digestive system is in good health. Although symptoms can frequently be a good indicator of a gut problem, the lack of digestive symptoms doesn't rule out a leaky gut.

So how do you heal the gut and restore the health of the gut microbiome? I recommend using the "5-R Protocol", which involves 1) removing the leaky gut trigger (i.e. food allergen, infection, environmental toxin), 2) replace certain factors that play a role in digestion (i.e. digestive enzymes, betaine HCL, bile salts, dietary fiber), 3) reinoculate through strain-specific probiotics and prebiotics, 4) repair the gut through gut-healing foods (i.e. bone broth, cabbage juice) and/or gut-healing natural agents (i.e. L-glutamine, demulcent herbs), and 5) rebalancing the body, especially the parasympathetic nervous system.

7. ADDRESS INFECTIONS (ESPECIALLY GUT AND STEALTH INFECTIONS).

Certain infections can cause thyroid autoimmunity, including bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungal infections. It's also worth mentioning that in some cases infections can also directly affect the thyroid gland. Some of the common infections associated with thyroid health and/or thyroid autoimmunity include the Epstein-Barr virus, Herpes simplex virus, Hepatitis C, Parvovirus B19, Helicobacter pylori, Yersinia enterocolitica, Borrelia burgdorferi (the bacteria associated with Lyme disease), and Blastocystis hominis.

One dilemma someone with an infection faces is whether to use conventional treatment methods, such as prescription antibiotics, or take a natural treatment approach. You have to weigh both the benefits and risks of using conventional and natural treatment methods when eradicating infections. In most cases, taking prescription drugs will be a quicker process, but they also are harsher on the gut flora and are associated with greater side effects. However, it frequently will take longer to eradicate an infection using natural antimicrobials.

Some natural agents that have antimicrobial properties include garlic, oregano oil, goldenseal, mastic gum (for H. pylori), Cat's claw, caprylic acid, wormwood, black walnut, uva ursi, lysine, olive leaf, and colloidal silver. While natural antimicrobials are less harsh on the gut flora than prescription antibiotics, this doesn't mean that they are completely harmless. Of course everything comes down to risks vs. benefits, and in most cases, when someone has a pathogenic infection or a Candida overgrowth, using natural antimicrobials will be less harsh on the body than prescription drugs. However, I just want to let you know that you need to be cautious about randomly taking large doses of natural antimicrobials, especially for a prolonged period.

8. CONSIDER BIOFILM DISRUPTORS (WHEN ADDRESSING INFECTIONS).

A biofilm is a group of microorganisms (e.g., bacteria, yeast) that form a protective layer. Bacterial biofilms can be resistant to both prescription antibiotics and natural antimicrobials. Candida albicans can also form biofilms, which makes them resistant to certain antifungal medications such as Fluconazole, as well as natural antimicrobials. Since many people with thyroid and autoimmune thyroid conditions have these types of infections, it can be beneficial to understand how to disrupt these biofilms.

If someone has an infection, how can you tell if the bacteria or yeast have biofilms? Unfortunately, most labs that test for infections don't test for the presence of biofilms. As a result, when treating these infections you are faced with a couple of different options.

One option is to take the necessary treatment without any biofilm disruptors, and hope that biofilms aren't present. The second option is to take biofilm disruptors whenever treating any bacterial or yeast infection.

Evidence shows that biofilm-related infections account for at least 65% of all human infections. And so it might be a good idea to play it safe and take some type of biofilm disruptor when combating any type of infection.

A few different natural agents have been shown to dissolve the biofilm matrix. This includes N-acetylcysteine (NAC), which not only can reduce and prevent biofilm formation, but can also help support detoxification through glutathione production.

Some studies specifically show that NAC can inhibit biofilm formation by H. pylori and Candida albicans. Proteolytic enzymes, which break down proteins, can help to degrade biofilm when taken on an empty stomach. Examples of proteolytic enzymes include serratiopeptidase, endopeptidase, and exopeptidase. A number of different studies showed that colloidal silver can be effective against the biofilm of Candida albicans. A few studies also showed that colloidal silver has antibiofilm activity in Staphylococcus aureus.

9. REDUCE YOUR TOXIC LOAD/ENHANCE DETOXIFICATION AND METHYLATION.

As you know, we live in a toxic world, and as a result, you want to do things to minimize your exposure to environmental toxins and increase the elimination of these chemicals from your body. Some of the ways to minimize your exposure to environmental chemicals is by 1) eating whole healthy foods, preferably certified organic, 2) drink purified water or spring water out of a glass bottle, 3) use natural household cleaners and cosmetics, 4) consider replacing your carpeting, 5) use low or no-VOC paints, 6) use safe cookware (avoid aluminum pots and pans), and 7) invest in a quality air purification system (we use BlueAir).

As for how to enhance the elimination of environmental chemicals from your body, you should 1) enhance phase one detoxification by eating plenty of vegetables...especially cruciferous vegetables, 2) support methylation by eating foods rich in folate (i.e. dark green leafy vegetables), vitamin B12 (beef, chicken, fish), and vitamin B6 (turkey, beef, chicken, salmon, sweet potatoes) and/or through supplementation, 3) stimulate bile production by eating dark green leafy vegetables, celery, watercress, and dandelion, 4) drink purified water (40 to 50% of your body weight in ounces), 5) make sure you're not constipated, 6) consider supplementing with milk thistle, NAC, alpha lipoic acid, acetylated or liposomal glutathione, and/or trimethylglycine, 7) sweat out the toxins through infrared sauna therapy, 8) consider coffee enemas and/or colon hydrotherapy (at least in some situations).

Electronic pollution is also something to think about. We are surrounded by electromagnetic fields, also known as EMFs. Every electronic device emits EMFs.

This includes televisions, computers, refrigerators, cell phones, vacuum cleaners, and fluorescent lights. One study on the correlation between cell phone use and thyroid health showed a higher than normal TSH and lower thyroid hormone levels in those who used their cell phones more frequently. The study concluded that there are possible harmful effects of mobile microwaves on the hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid axis.

Another study looked to explore the association between radiation exposure and thyroid dysfunction among mobile phone users. The authors concluded that there was a significant correlation between total radiation exposure and increasing TSH values among both all respondents.

10. DON'T OVERLOOK TOXIC MOLD.

Most people don't consider the negative impact that mold can have on their health. But the mycotoxins produced from mold can cause many health issues and sometimes lead to debilitating symptoms. Over 300 types of mycotoxins are produced by molds. Although water damage is a big concern, food can also be a source of mycotoxins, especially nuts and grains.

Genetics plays an important role in how people will react to mold. But those who have problems clearing out mycotoxins from their body can experience many different symptoms. Some of the more common symptoms of mold exposure include severe fatigue, anxiety, dizziness, memory loss, migraines, skin rashes, respiratory distress, neurological symptoms, and frequent static shocks.

Testing your home for mold is an option if you suspect that this might be a problem. But sometimes it makes more sense to test for mycotoxins, which you can do through companies such as Realtime Laboratories and Great Plains Laboratory. Certain blood tests can also give an indication if mold is a problem, along with something called a visual contrast sensitivity test that you can do online. You can order a test by visiting VCSTest.com.

As for how to address a mold problem, the most important thing that needs to be done is to eliminate the source of the mold. If you're being exposed to mold through the food you eat, then it might not be too challenging to reduce or even completely eliminate your exposure.

However, if you have mold in your home or place of work then this probably will require remediation or, in some cases, moving or quitting your job. It also is usually necessary to take action to remove mycotoxins through your body, which can be accomplished through the use of certain binders (i.e. cholestryamine, bentonite clay, activated charcoal), and supporting your detoxification pathways...specifically the production of glutathione.

11. TAKE ADDITIONAL MEASURES TO REDUCE SYSTEMIC INFLAMMATION.

While finding and removing your triggers will frequently resolve the inflammation, this isn't always the case. For those with Graves' disease and Hashimoto's thyroiditis, this can be one reason why your thyroid antibodies don't decrease…even after finding and removing all of your triggers. Something called Nuclear Factor Kappa B (NF-kB) is a transcription factor that plays a role in the inflammatory process. When someone gets exposed to a trigger, this, in turn, will activate proinflammatory cytokines.

These cytokines promote inflammation. While the activation of NF-kB is a normal process, what occurs with chronic inflammation is the chronic activation of NF-kB. Thus, you have a viscous cycle that perpetuates the inflammation, even after the trigger has been removed. As a result, it is necessary to downregulate NF-kB. This can be accomplished through diet, stress management, and taking certain nutrients and herbs. Vitamin D can help to inhibit NF-kB, along with turmeric, resveratrol, ginger, omega-3 fatty acids, and green tea.

In addition to downregulating or inhibiting NF-kB, you also want to have an abundance of regulatory T cells (Tregs). The good news is that the nutrients I just mentioned can also help to increase Tregs. Other nutrients can also help modulate the immune system in a positive way. These include probiotics, vitamin A, and alpha lipoic acid.

12. TAKE ACTION TO FIND YOUR TRIGGERS AND UNDERLYING IMBALANCES.

When it comes to trying to find out the cause of your thyroid or autoimmune thyroid condition, testing can play a very important role. This is why I recommend testing to just about all of my patients. However, one shouldn't underestimate the importance of a comprehensive health history. While, many times, doing a thorough health history alone won't identify your autoimmune thyroid triggers, it can still provide some important clues.

As for blood tests, nearly everyone with Graves' disease and Hashimoto's will get some type of thyroid-related blood tests, and many will have other blood tests done. But can blood tests help to detect your triggers? In many cases, blood tests won't be enough to detect the underlying cause of your condition. However, there are some exceptions, and certain blood tests can provide some valuable information that plays a role in helping you to get into remission and achieve optimal health. For example, viruses can be a trigger and can be measured through the blood, as can some other types of infections.

In addition to blood tests, other types of testing are frequently necessary to detect your triggers and other underlying imbalances. This can include adrenal testing, heavy metals, a comprehensive stool panel, tests for nutrient deficiencies, sex hormone testing, an organic acids test, etc. I'm not suggesting that you need to order all of these tests, as, many times, only a few basic tests are needed. Other times, more comprehensive testing is necessary.

4 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resource #1: Subscribe to the Save My Thyroid podcast

(visit www.SaveMyThyroidPodcast.com)

Resource #2: Visit the website www.NaturalEndocrineSolutions.com for hundreds of articles and blog posts on natural treatment solutions for thyroid and autoimmune thyroid conditions.

Resource #3: Join my free "Hyperthyroidism & Graves' Disease Natural Solutions" Support Group:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/hyperthyroidhealing/

Resource #4: Read my books "Natural Treatment Solutions for Hyperthyroidism and Graves' Disease" and "Hashimoto's Triggers", which can be found on Amazon.