



Dr. Henry writes about the thyroid gland

There has been some discussion recently about the thyroid gland, and thus I feel inclined to share my experience with this gland. It is one of the endocrine glands meaning that it secretes a hormone, thyroxine, and there is a feed back system for maintaining therapeutic blood levels for this hormone to the brain, more specially the pituitary gland. Thyroid hormone regulates the rate of the body's metabolism. This gland is of interest to psychiatrists because an elevated or lowered thyroxine level causes emotional changes. An elevated thyroid can cause anxiety, restlessness, hyperactivity, increased heart rate, and increased appetite without weight gain. An extreme of hyperthyroidism is called thyroid storm, and if untreated, can result in congestive heart failure and death. A depressed thyroid gland or lowered thyroid hormone level can cause depression, lethargy, fatigue, unexplained weight gain, and psychomotor slowing. There are many other symptoms associated with thyroid disease that I did not mention.

For years doctors have prescribed supplemental thyroid to individuals whose blood levels of thyroid are low normal. It has even been used by some as a supplemental treatment for depression. Thus it would not be that unusual to add supplemental thyroid to the drug regimen for trying to treat the fatigue symptoms of PPS as long as the blood level of thyroid hormone did not exceed the normal range. Many of us take hormones for various conditions. Some of these familiar hormones are estrogen, progesterone, insulin, cortisone (Prednisone), epinephrine (adrenalin), growth hormone, and DHEA.

In addition to the signs and symptoms of thyroid disease, there are a number of blood tests available to assess thyroid function. In most labs these tests are linked together as a thyroid panel of tests which include T3, T4, T7, and TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone secreted by the pituitary gland). If the thyroid level in the blood is low due to an inactive gland, then the TSH is usually elevated as the pituitary gland is trying to correct the problem by secreting more TSH. If the thyroid gland is overactive, the TSH is usually lowered. This is an elementary explanation, but gives you some idea how feedback systems work in the human body. In addition to blood tests, the thyroid gland can be further evaluated by thyroid scans and X-rays. For the most part, the thyroid gland is well understood. Although, the exophthalmos (bulging eyeballs) as a result of Grave's disease (hyperthyroidism) is not well understood to my knowledge.

Hopefully, PPS will be better understood with time, and I hope not too much time.

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