

## Treating Thyroid Problems with Acupuncture

**When functioning properly, the thyroid gland secretes just the right amount of thyroid hormone to regulate almost all the metabolic processes in your body. Too much or too little of these vital body chemicals and it can drastically influence energy levels, body weight and your mental health. With over 20 million Americans living with some form of thyroid disease, much attention has been given to the many ways that acupuncture and Oriental medicine can treat thyroid problems.**

### **What is the thyroid?**

The thyroid is a butterfly shaped gland that sits in the front of the neck. It is responsible for energy, metabolism, hormone regulation, body weight and blood calcium levels. Thyroid disorders stem from either an overproduction (hyperthyroidism) or underproduction (hypothyroidism) of thyroid hormones. When your thyroid is not functioning properly, your body can experience a variety of symptoms:

#### **Hyperthyroidism:**

- Weight loss despite increased appetite
- Increased heart rate, heart palpitations, higher blood pressure, nervousness, and excessive perspiration
- More frequent bowel movements, sometimes with diarrhea
- Muscle weakness, trembling hands
- Development of a goiter (an enlargement in your neck)
- Lighter or shorter menstrual periods



#### **Hypothyroidism:**

- Lethargy, slower mental processes or depression
- Reduced heart rate
- Increased sensitivity to cold
- Tingling or numbness in the hands
- Development of a goiter (an enlargement in your neck)
- Constipation, heavy menstrual periods or dry skin and hair

Hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism can be diagnosed by testing the levels of thyroid hormones in your blood. Hormones secreted by the thyroid are measured, as well as thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), a chemical released by the pituitary gland that triggers hormone production in the thyroid. Some milder

forms of hypothyroidism can also be detected by a consistently low basal body temperature.

### **How can acupuncture help?**

Both Western and Eastern medicine offer various methods to restore thyroid hormone levels. Western treatments rely mainly on drugs and surgery while Eastern treatments aim to restore immune function as well as balance the production and release of thyroid hormones through a variety of approaches ranging from acupuncture and herbal remedies to lifestyle changes and special exercises.

In the treatment to thyroid problems, acupuncture can be used to restore hormonal balance, regulate energy levels, smooth emotions and help manage sleep, emotions and menstrual problems. There are several powerful acupuncture points on the ear and the body that can be used to regulate the production of thyroid hormones. Treatments take all of your symptoms into account and are aimed at balancing the energy within the body to optimize health.

When it comes to lifestyle changes, a diet rich in protein, calcium, magnesium, and iodine helps support thyroid function while certain foods known as goitrogens may interfere with thyroid hormone production and should be limited. These include cruciferous vegetables (such as cauliflower, cabbage, and Brussels sprouts), peanuts, and soy. Stress reducing exercises such as yoga or tai chi can also be beneficial.

**Blood tests may not be sensitive enough to detect milder forms of hypothyroidism. Monitoring your body's basal (resting) temperature is often used to identify a thyroid hormone deficiency.**

### **How to Monitor Your Basal Temperature**

To track your basal temperature accurately, follow these guidelines:

- Shake the thermometer below 95°F at night and place it where you can reach it without getting out of bed.
- The following morning, before you get out of bed, take your temperature via your armpit for 10 minutes while staying as still as possible.
- Keep records of your temperature for at least three days. (Women should do this during the first two weeks of the menstrual cycle, as their basal temperature may rise during the latter half.)



- Normal basal body temperatures fall between 97.4° F and 97.8° F. If your basal temperature is consistently low, you could be mildly hypothyroid.

### **Three Foods to Support Thyroid Function**

**Seaweed** - Iodine is an essential element that assists the thyroid in producing thyroid hormone. By increasing iodine intake, patients have seen an increase in the production of thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH). The best natural source of iodine is kelp, bladderwrack and other seaweeds.

**Coconut Oil** - Virgin coconut oil is praised by health experts for its ability to lower cholesterol and stabilize blood sugar. It is made up largely of medium chain fatty acids, or triglycerides (MCTs). MCTs are known to speed metabolism, promote weight loss, and raise basal body temperatures.

**Brazil nuts and walnuts** – These nuts contain high amounts of selenium. Many hypothyroid patients have been found to have deficiencies in this trace mineral.