

# Low Thyroid Function: Beyond the TSH Test

By Dr. Arjuna Veeravagu ND RAc

Low thyroid function (or hypothyroidism) is a common condition that is frequently unrecognized. It occurs most commonly in women and often presents with a wide variety of symptoms that may at first appear unconnected. It is estimated that as many as ten percent of Canadian women may have hypothyroidism, which is far greater than the number who are actually diagnosed.

## The Thyroid Gland and its Function

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland located in the front of the neck just below the larynx or “Adam’s apple.” The function of the thyroid gland is to combine iodine from the diet with the amino acid tyrosine to produce hormones which regulate the body’s metabolism. Thyroid hormones act like a gas pedal, adjusting the metabolic speed of all cells in the body.

## Major Signs and Symptoms of Low Thyroid Function

As the thyroid is the body’s main metabolic regulator, people with low thyroid function will have signs and symptoms of a slow metabolism, which may include weight gain, dry skin and hair, decreased memory, fatigue, hair loss, difficulty concentrating, cold body temperature, constipation or depression.

## Problems with Thyroid Testing

The conventional medical assessment of thyroid function relies almost exclusively on one test called thyroid stimulating hormone or TSH. There are two main problems with this. The first is that TSH is an indirect measure of thyroid status and does not always correlate with one’s actual thyroid status. The second is that the span of the normal range of thyroid function is far too

wide. Many patients who display clear signs and symptoms of low thyroid function are often classified within the normal range, and problems persist. Thyroid specialist Richard Shames MD describes the steadfast reliance on the existing TSH normal range as “the tyranny of the test.”

## Above and Beyond Conventional Testing

The first step in having thyroid function assessed is to consult with a physician who can thoroughly review the signs and symptoms of low thyroid function through physical examination and history taking. If low thyroid function is suspected, a full thyroid blood test panel should be ordered, including the free thyroid hormones and thyroid antibodies. If hypothyroidism is confirmed, a treatment plan should be undertaken that may include thyroid hormone replacement, herbal and nutritional supplementation, dietary and lifestyle changes. Possible underlying causes such as adrenal imbalances, food sensitivities, intestinal parasites and environmental toxicity should be assessed and treated as well.



**Seminar:** to learn more about Low Thyroid Function, join Dr. Veeravagu for a seminar on Thursday, September 24. *View the Seminar Calendar for more information.*

## References:

Shames, R. (2002). *Thyroid Power*. Harper Collins.  
American Academy of Clinical Endocrinologists. (2002). *Subclinical Thyroid Disease*.

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