

# Thyroid Treatment

Your thyroid hormone regulates your whole body, including many symptoms of depression such as appetite, energy and motivation. Low thyroid is a common medical problem which can be treated by taking additional supplement of this hormone.

Thyroid hormone can also be used to enhance the effects of antidepressant treatment even when your thyroid levels are in the normal range. For example, studies have found that lithium works best when the thyroid-TSH level is close to the middle of the range (around 2.5). Thyroid augmentation is also one of the best-studied strategies for helping antidepressants work better.

There are two types of thyroid supplement used in psychiatry, T3 (or cytomel) and T4 (or synthroid). The risks and benefits with these are similar. T3 may be more active in the brain.

## How to take thyroid medicine

Thyroid medicine should be taken on an empty stomach. Do not take it at the same time as your other medications and vitamins (it should be taken at least 4 hours apart otherwise they may interfere with its absorption).

The dosing of your thyroid supplement will be guided by your lab results. The main lab test for thyroid is the TSH level – note that a high TSH means your thyroid levels are low, while a low TSH means they are high.

## Side effects and risks

Side effects of thyroid treatment can include anxiety, tremor and weight loss. There are medical risks associated with using thyroid supplementation to enhance your antidepressant treatment (that is, taking extra thyroid when your levels were normal to begin with). These risks are:

- 1) Osteoporosis: this is when your bone mineral density is lower. It can increase the risk of bone fractures. Your risk of osteoporosis is also elevated if you are older, went through early menopause, took corticosteroids for prolonged periods, or have a family history of osteoporosis.
- 2) Atrial fibrillation: an abnormal fluttering of the heart. Symptoms of this include: Palpitations (racing, uncomfortable, or irregular heartbeat), chest pain, shortness of breath, lightheadedness and low blood pressure.

## Drug interactions

The following drugs may decrease your levels of thyroid medicine: Antacids, iron, calcium and carbamazepine.

–Chris Aiken, MD, Updated 3/10/2013