

How does natural progesterone affect thyroid function?

Hi Catherine,

I would like information on how the progesterone affects the thyroid. I am hypothyroid. When I take the cream it has the affect (after about a week) of too much thyroid medication. Please explain why this happens.

Thanks,

Terri

Dear Terri,

The thyroid gland, largest of the endocrine glands, is the body's metabolic thermostat. It regulates body temperature and the rate of energy production, which greatly influences the rate at which all body organs function. This butterfly-shaped gland, located close to the windpipe, secretes two hormones: thyroxine (T4) and tri-iodothyronine (T3). Approximately 93% of the thyroid gland production is T4 with 7% T3. Secretion of thyroid hormones is regulated by thyroid-stimulating hormone, secreted by the pituitary gland in the brain. The thyroid gland also secretes a hormone called calcitonin, involved in calcium metabolism.

Although all the body's hormones interact, there is a closer than usual relationship of thyroid to ovarian hormones. Most commonly, as a woman approaches menopause, estrogen excess or progesterone deficiency tends to cause a hypothyroid state.

Progesterone deficiency, for example, can cause fatigue, weight gain, irritability, depression, memory and concentration problems, headaches, irregular and painful menstrual cycles, fluid retention, loss of sex drive, and cold hands and feet. These same symptoms are also characteristic of hypothyroidism and thyroid hormone resistance.

Emerging evidence suggests the symptoms of hypothyroidism occurring in patients with progesterone deficiency become less so when progesterone is added and hormone balance is achieved. In other words, progesterone supplementation can play a major role in balancing our hormones which can very likely include improved thyroid hormone function.

Many women suffering estrogen dominance are taking thyroid supplements that, when progesterone is introduced and estrogen dominance is corrected, can often reduced or eliminate thyroid medication altogether. Therefore, if you have been diagnosed with a thyroid problem, are on thyroid medication and now want to incorporate natural progesterone into your regime, there's no reason why you can't providing you do so under the strict supervision of your treating physician.

Your thyroid medication, however, may require regular adjustment as progesterone exerts an influence upon the thyroid gland (progesterone may cause a potentiation of thyroxine's effects leading to hyperthyroidism).