

Health Awareness

From Fast Track To Fatigue: Is Uncontrolled Thyroid Disease Impacting You?

(NAPSM)—Fatigue, unexplained weight changes, abnormal cholesterol or blood pressure, feeling depressed, menstrual cycle irregularities, heart palpitations, foggy thinking...all are symptoms of thyroid disease. Of the 27 million Americans who live with thyroid disease, more than eight out of 10 of them are women—and half of patients do not know they have it. But why is thyroid health so important?

“The thyroid gland helps control every cell, tissue and organ in the body,” explains Jeffrey Garber, M.D., FACP, FACE, immediate past president of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists (AACE) and author of “The Harvard Medical School Guide to Overcoming Thyroid Problems.” “In short, if the thyroid isn’t functioning properly, neither are you.”

Thyroid dysfunction may manifest itself in one of two ways—underactive or overactive. For Olympic track legend and “fastest woman in the world” Gail Devers, an undiagnosed overactive thyroid almost ended her track career.

“For almost three years, I felt worse and worse. My hair fell out and my weight fell to under 80 pounds, but doctors thought it was the stress of my training regimen,” said Devers. “Luckily, a chance meeting with a UCLA

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team physician and a blood test called a TSH test confirmed I had Graves’ disease [overactive thyroid].”

Thyroid Disease Treatment: The Importance of Precision and Consistency

Although daily treatment of thyroid disease is fairly routine, it also requires special attention for optimal results. Because the thyroid gland and hormonal system are delicate, precise treatment of thyroid disease and follow-up with a physician is critical.

When to Ask for a Thyroid Test

Thyroid dysfunction is usually caused by an autoimmune condition, one of many conditions where the body’s immune system attacks itself. As an autoimmune condition, the genetic links for thyroid disease are very high, particularly for women. Another risk factor may be a personal or family history of thyroid and/or autoimmune disease.

“It is critical to keep an eye out for thyroid disease and not dismiss the symptoms, particularly if thyroid disease or other autoimmune conditions run in your fam-

ily,” said Dr. Garber. “Catching thyroid conditions at early stages can help keep patients in good health.”

“Although no one else in my family had thyroid disease, I now know there are links to other autoimmune conditions,” said Devers. “For example, four of my aunts and uncles have type 1 diabetes, and my mother was recently diagnosed with lupus. Knowing your family history and telling your doctor can help you avoid the years of health uncertainty I experienced.”

Though there are many symptoms of thyroid disease, some patients experience only a few or none at all. It is important for patients to speak up when they feel poorly or have consistent symptoms such as ongoing fatigue, unexplained weight loss or gain, foggy thinking, sensitivity to heat or cold, digestive issues, and brittle hair or nails. A blood test known as the TSH (Thyroid Stimulating Hormone) test can determine if thyroid disease is present. Your doctor will determine the treatment that is right for you.

For more information about thyroid disease, its symptoms and questions to ask your doctor, visit www.powerofprevention.com, AACE’s endocrine awareness and patient education website.