

5 Emails on Hypothyroidism

Email 1

Subject: Eye problems related to hyperthyroidism

Dear [Name],

Graves' ophthalmopathy is a potentially serious eye disease that can occur in people who have hyperthyroidism because of Graves' disease. Graves' disease is an autoimmune disorder in which the immune system attacks the thyroid gland, causing it to overproduce thyroid hormone. In Graves' ophthalmopathy, the same antibodies that attack the thyroid also attack tissues behind the eyes.

Fortunately, while Graves' disease affects approximately 1 in 200 people, Graves' ophthalmopathy is rare, occurring in just 16 women and 4 men out of every 100,000. Smokers and people who are exposed to second-hand smoke are at a higher risk of the condition than non-smokers. While you can't do much to avoid this condition, quitting smoking and avoiding second-hand smoke can lower your risk.

Graves' ophthalmopathy is marked by bulging eyes, inflammation in the whites of the eyes, double vision, and eye irritation, which may include dry eyes, watery eyes, and a sensation of sand in the eyes.

Often, this condition will go away on its own with the help of home treatments that soothe the eyes, such as using eye drops and moist compresses. However, if you have Graves' ophthalmopathy, it's important to be monitored by an eye doctor. In extreme cases, inflammation may limit the movement of the eyes, or prevent the eyelids from closing completely. In these cases, surgery may be necessary. Without treatment, vision loss can result.

Most often, people develop Graves' ophthalmopathy within six months of a diagnosis of Graves' disease, although in some cases it develops years later. In a few cases, Graves ophthalmopathy is the first sign that there may be a problem with hyperthyroidism. If you have Graves' disease or a family history of thyroid problems, it's important to get regular eye exams. Your eye doctor may be able to spot the early warning signs of eye problems, making them easier to treat.

Be sure to join us next time, when we will share tips for managing stress when you have hyperthyroidism.

Email 2

Subject: Stress reduction and management tips

Dear [Name],

The thyroid produces hormones that control our metabolism and affect almost every tissue in our body. When the thyroid produces too much hormone, every system in our body speeds up, unhealthily. This is known as hyperthyroidism.

Stress, which most of us struggle with, also causes our systems to go on high alert. This makes the symptoms of hyperthyroidism worse. Stress can also trigger hyperthyroidism in susceptible individuals. That's why it's particularly important for people with thyroid problems to work on reducing stress levels.

To manage stress levels, it's important to balance plenty of physical movement with relaxing and nourishing activities. Exercise is essential for managing stress because it helps burn away stress chemicals. After a good workout, eating well and resting helps the body heal and grow stronger.

To get a handle on your stress, follow these tips:

- **Exercise:** Aim for 150 minutes of brisk movement a week, or around 30 minutes a day of walking, biking, yardwork, dancing, or any other brisk movement you enjoy.
- **Eat well:** Eat plenty of fresh fruits and veggies, emphasizing whole grains and lean protein, and cut back on fast food, processed food, sugar, alcohol and processed and cured meats.
- **Sleep:** Aim to get 7-8 hours of sleep a night.
- **Make time for things you enjoy:** Cultivate friendships, hobbies, and meaningful work (paid or volunteer) that bring joy to your life.
- **Breathe:** Deep breathing helps turn off stress and turn on relaxation. For an easy two-minute refresher, try breathing in for a count of four, and exhaling slowly for a count of 8. Repeat 10 times. This breathing pattern helps the body relax.

If you're struggling to manage your stress, it's ok to start slowly. Try walking around the block for ten minutes every day and add a piece of fruit to every meal. Before long, you'll feel better and be motivated to change even more.

Next time, join us as we look at mistakes your doctor may be making in diagnosing and treating your hyperthyroidism.

Email 3

Subject: Hyperthyroidism - mistakes your doctor may be making

Dear [Name],

While hyperthyroidism can be a very serious disorder, in most cases it can be diagnosed with a simple blood test and treated with one of several effective treatments. However, as with any medical problem, doctors can sometimes miss important pieces of the puzzle. If you have hyperthyroid problems, be aware of these common mistakes that your doctor could be making:

- Dismissing hyperthyroidism as stress or anxiety. Particularly in the early stages, the symptoms of hyperthyroidism can be subtle. Hyperthyroidism causes the metabolism to speed up, which can result in rapid heartbeat, weight loss, fine tremors, as well as anxiety, sleep disturbances, and other problems. If these symptoms are mild, it's easy for both the patient and their doctor to dismiss them as stress.
- Misdiagnosing hyperthyroidism in older adults. In seniors, the symptoms of hyperthyroidism (rapid heartbeat, fatigue, withdrawal, weight loss) can be hard to spot, and are sometimes mistaken for depression or dementia.
- Not investigating lighter or missing menstrual cycles. Hyperthyroidism often causes periods to become lighter or stop, which can have long-term implications for bone and heart health, as well as fertility. Your doctor should ask about your cycles as part of your regular check-ups, but if not, always let your doctor know about any changes from the norm in your menstrual cycles. If your periods are changing, ask your doctor to help you determine why.
- Not consulting with or referring patients to an endocrinologist. While family doctors are able to diagnose and treat hyperthyroidism, many patients benefit from seeing an endocrinologist. Endocrinologists are specialists in hormones and can treat all thyroid disorders. Seeing a specialist is particularly important for teens, as their bodies continue to grow and develop through puberty.

If you think something may be wrong with your thyroid, ask your doctor for a simple blood test to check your levels of thyroid hormone, and ask for a referral to an endocrinologist if your health problems persist.

Next time, watch for our email with tips for helping children with hyperthyroidism.

Email 4

Subject: Tips for helping a child who suffers with hyperthyroidism

Dear [Name],

Hyperthyroidism occurs when the body has high thyroid hormone levels. It can cause a variety of symptoms including weight loss, nervousness, trouble sleeping, and a rapid heartbeat. While hyperthyroidism is most common in adults, it can develop in children of any age from birth to adulthood, with onset being most common in adolescence.

The most common cause of hyperthyroidism is an autoimmune condition called Graves' disease, which can run in families. Fortunately, while hyperthyroidism can be serious, most cases can be effectively treated within a few months, although a few patients will require medication for their whole lives.

If your child has been diagnosed with hyperthyroidism, here are some tips to help them thrive:

- Visit an endocrinologist. Endocrinologists are specialists in hormones and the complex role that they play in our bodies. While family doctors can diagnose and treat hyperthyroidism, children's growing bodies are complex. Endocrinologists are best able to manage the care of a child with hyperthyroidism.
- For girls with hyperthyroidism, teach them to carefully monitor their periods. Many girls and women with hyperthyroidism have irregular periods, or don't get periods at all. Missing periods can affect women's bone and heart health as well as fertility. It's important that girls with hyperthyroidism know to consult their gynecologist if something is wrong with their cycles.
- Schedule regular visits with an eye doctor. Hyperthyroidism caused by Graves' disease can lead to eye problems because the same antibodies that cause the thyroid to produce too much hormone can also cause swelling behind the eyes. This can cause dry eyes, watery eyes, bulging eyes, and irritation. Not all people with Graves' disease have eye problems, but when they occur, they can be serious and may lead to vision loss. Regular visits to an eye doctor will help catch any problems early.

Did you know that cats and dogs can also have hyperthyroidism? Stay tuned for the next email to learn more.

Email 5

Subject: Your pet can suffer from hyperthyroidism too

Dear [Name],

All vertebrate animals have a thyroid gland in or near their neck. This small, butterfly shaped gland produces hormones that affect many bodily processes. If the thyroid doesn't produce just the right amount of hormone, problems result. In hyperthyroidism, the thyroid produces too much hormone. This causes the metabolism to speed up, resulting in weight loss, nervousness, rapid heartbeat and more. Humans can suffer from hyperthyroidism, but so can your family pet.

Hyperthyroidism is more common in cats than dogs, and most often occurs in middle-aged to elderly cats. It is usually caused by a benign thyroid tumor. Symptoms include weight loss, increased hunger, hyperexcitability, vomiting, diarrhea, rapid heart rate, and shortness of breath. Fortunately, there are many effective treatments.

The most common treatment for cats with hyperthyroidism is radioactive iodine treatment. In this treatment, the cat is given a small amount of radioactive iodine. The iodine is absorbed by the thyroid, where the radiation collects, killing the overactive tissues without harming the surrounding area. Hyperthyroidism in cats can also be treated by surgery, daily medication, or a special diet for life.

In dogs, hyperthyroidism is less common than hypothyroidism (too little thyroid hormone), but it can happen. It is most often caused by a thyroid tumor or thyroid cancer. However, it can also occur in dogs with hypothyroidism who are given too much medication.

Some dogs on a raw diet have also developed hyperthyroidism. This occurs if the raw diet includes too many animal necks (which contain the thyroid gland), effectively dosing the dog with thyroid hormone. Varying the source of meat in a raw diet can help prevent this problem.

The symptoms of hyperthyroidism in dogs are the same as in cats. The treatment will vary depending on the cause of the problem. If diet or medications are causing the hyperthyroidism, it can easily be cured. Unfortunately, thyroid cancers can be difficult to treat. Early treatment offers the best chance of recovery, so always take your pet to the vet at the first sign of illness.