



HYPOTHYROIDISM STILL THE UNSUSPECTED ILLNESS?

By Michael E. Doyle, MD

It may surprise you to know that a century ago hypothyroidism was a treatable illness. By 1914, European doctors, led by Eugene Hertoghe, had figured out how to diagnose and treat all forms of this condition. Top American physicians invited Dr. Hertoghe to teach his approach and American doctors learned that they could diagnose hypothyroidism by simply listening to their patients and looking for certain typical signs. Hertoghe also taught that the low thyroid state could be reversed by giving patients enough natural thyroid extract to restore their health. His simple approach was highly effective and was widely used.

But soon things began to change. Laboratory tests were developed to help doctors diagnose this condition. Unfortunately, the tests began to replace the basic practice of listening to and examining patients. Doctors were soon taught to ignore their clinical judgment and rely solely on laboratory tests. A parade of tests was developed. Each new laboratory test became the “right” way to diagnose low thyroid ... until it was discarded and replaced by another “better” test. Many people with classical signs of low thyroid function, such as fatigue, low body temperature, depression, hair loss, weight gain, muscle pains, and so on, were told that they were “fine,” and went untreated.

Meanwhile, synthetic thyroid treatments were developed to replace the natural extracts that worked so well. These new medications sometimes didn't reverse

low thyroid symptoms as well as the older thyroid extracts. This may be because natural thyroid extracts combined all four human thyroid hormones, while the newer medicines contained just one.

Some doctors, such as Broda Barnes, MD, refused to follow the new approach. Rather than relying only on the latest tests and treatments, Barnes continued to use the approach that worked best for his patients—medical judgment and natural thyroid extracts. To help patients better understand their illness, Barnes wrote a book entitled *Hypothyroidism: The Unsuspected Illness*, which also includes his discussion of the evidence linking low thyroid to hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease and many other conditions. Barnes is also known for developing a method of using body temperature to help diagnose and treat hypothyroidism. This technique was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1942, but is generally long forgotten.

In recent years, many physicians and scientists have continued to question the modern methods and many scientific studies have demonstrated the limitations of modern testing and treatment approaches. In fact, the case has become so clear that even the “experts” have begun to notice. In 2003, Sir Anthony Toft, former president of the Royal Thyroid Academy, stated that based on scientific evidence, “the treatment of hypothyroidism is about to come full circle”—by going back to the old-fashioned approach. Maybe doctors such as Barnes and Hertoghe have been right all along. ❖

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