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Thyroid Disorders and Men's Sexual Health

Here on Sex Health Matters, we often discuss medical conditions that interfere with a man's sexual health, such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. But did you know that thyroid disorders can also be involved?

Today, let's talk about the thyroid gland, its role in the body, and how certain disorders have been linked to sexual problems for men.

What is the thyroid gland?

Your thyroid is a small, butterfly-shaped gland at the front of your neck. It's about 2 inches long and weighs about an ounce. But despite its small size, it is a major player in your overall health.

The thyroid gland produces hormones that control your metabolism – how fast or slow organs in your body work. These hormones influence your breathing, your heartbeat, your brain, and your nervous system. They also help regulate your body temperature, weight, and cholesterol levels.

Hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism

When your thyroid makes too much hormone, a condition called hyperthyroidism or overactive thyroid, your body will work faster than it should. As a result, you may feel your heartbeat race, feel nervous or jumpy, and have problems sleeping. You might also feel warm, lose weight, and have diarrhea.

In contrast, hypothyroidism or underactive thyroid occurs when your thyroid doesn't make enough hormones. In this case, your body works more slowly. Symptoms of hypothyroidism include feeling cold, tired, achy, and constipated. You might gain weight and have dry skin.

Fortunately, both hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism can be treated by bringing thyroid hormone levels to a normal range.

For people with hyperthyroidism, this might mean medication or surgery. Another option is radioiodine therapy, which involves taking radioactive iodine pills. This substance eventually destroys the thyroid gland. In turn, patients do develop hypothyroidism, but some doctors feel that an underactive thyroid is easier to treat than an overactive one.

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Patients with hypothyroidism must take a medication called synthetic thyroxine, which is a substitute for the thyroid hormone. Typically, medicine must be taken for the rest of a patient's life, but it is very effective for treating an underactive thyroid.

What does the thyroid have to do with sexual problems?

Thyroid disorders, particularly hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism, have been associated with [erectile dysfunction \(ED\)](#) – the inability to get and keep an erection firm enough for sex – as well as other sexual problems like low libido, [premature ejaculation](#), and [delayed ejaculation](#). However, experts aren't completely sure why the conditions are related.

Research published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism in 2008 found that in 71 men with thyroid problems, 79% had some degree of ED. Erection problems were more common in men with hypothyroidism than hyperthyroidism. Men saw their erections improve with treatment for their thyroid disorder.

In 2005, the same journal published a study that looked at ED as well as other sexual dysfunctions in 48 men. Thirty-four men had hyperthyroidism and the remaining 14 had hypothyroidism. The men's sexual function was assessed while they were experiencing thyroid symptoms and again 8 to 16 weeks after their thyroid hormone levels were restored to a normal range.

At the start of the study, the researchers found that about 64% of the men with hypothyroidism had low sexual desire, ED, or delayed ejaculation. Around 7% had premature ejaculation.

Among men who had hyperthyroidism, half had premature ejaculation, 18% had low libido, 15% had ED, and 3% had delayed ejaculation.

Men's symptoms generally improved with thyroid treatment, however. For example, premature ejaculation prevalence dropped from 50% to 15% in the hyperthyroid men.

What should men do?

If you are having problems with erections, talk to your healthcare provider. ED can be a sign of other medical conditions, like heart disease and diabetes, so it's important to have a thorough checkup.

If a thyroid problem is suspected, your doctor will likely conduct a test for thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH). This hormone is produced by the pituitary gland and it regulates how much thyroid hormone the thyroid gland should produce. Your doctor will probably do some bloodwork to test for thyroid hormones, too. You might have a thyroid imaging scan as well.

Usually, treatment for thyroid disorders resolves any related sexual problems, although this might take a few months for some men. If the problems persist, don't hesitate to see your doctor again.

Resources

About.com

“Men: Is Your Thyroid Causing Sexual Problems?”

(Updated: February 23, 2016)

<http://thyroid.about.com/od/Sexual-Dysfunction/fl/Men-Is-Your-Thyroid-Causing-Sexual-Problems.htm>

Hormone Health Network

“What Does the Thyroid Gland Do?”

(November 2012)

<http://www.hormone.org/hormones-and-health/what-do-hormones-do/what-does-the-thyroid-gland-do>

International Society for Sexual Medicine

“Can thyroid problems contribute to erectile dysfunction (ED)?”

<http://www.issm.info/education-for-all/sexual-health-qa/can-thyroid-problems-contribute-to-erectile-dysfunction-ed>

Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism

Carani, Cesare, et al.

“Multicenter Study on the Prevalence of Sexual Symptoms in Male Hypo- and Hyperthyroid Patients”

(Full-text. 2005)

http://www.cenegenics.com/pdf_docs/Multicenter_Study_on_the_Prevalence_of_Sexual_Symptoms.pdf

Krassas, Gerasimos E., et al.

“Erectile Dysfunction in Patients with Hyper- and Hypothyroidism: How Common and Should We Treat?”

(Full-text. Accepted: February 5, 2008)

<http://press.endocrine.org/doi/full/10.1210/jc.2007-2259>

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

“Hyperthyroidism”

(August 2012)

<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-topics/endocrine/hyperthyroidism/Pages/fact-sheet.aspx>

“Hypothyroidism”

(March 2013)

<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-topics/endocrine/hypothyroidism/Pages/fact-sheet.aspx>