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Comprehensive Nutritional Strategies for the Management of Hypothyroidism: An Evidence-Based Review

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Abstract: ***Background: Hypothyroidism is one of the most common endocrine disorders globally, characterised by insufficient production of thyroid hormones. Although pharmacological replacement therapy remains the cornerstone of treatment, persistent symptoms are often reported despite normalised laboratory values. This has brought attention to adjunctive therapeutic approaches, particularly nutrition-based interventions. Objective: To critically evaluate and summarise current evidence surrounding nutritional strategies for the prevention and management of hypothyroidism and autoimmune thyroiditis, with emphasis on micronutrients, dietary patterns, gut health, and integrative lifestyle factors. Methods: This narrative review includes findings from peer-reviewed clinical trials, cohort studies, and meta-analyses published between 2010 and 2024. A systematic search was conducted in PubMed, Web of Science, and Scopus using relevant keywords. Results: Micronutrients such as iodine, selenium, iron, zinc, and vitamin D are vital for thyroid function. Specific dietary patterns including the Mediterranean diet and gluten-free diets can modulate autoimmune activity and systemic inflammation. Gut microbiota health and lifestyle components such as sleep and stress management also play crucial roles in disease modulation. Conclusion: Nutrition plays a central, under-utilised role in managing hypothyroidism. Personalised, evidence-based dietary interventions may improve symptoms, support hormone metabolism, and enhance quality of life.***

Keywords: Hypothyroidism, Hashimoto's thyroiditis, selenium, iodine, micronutrients, Mediterranean diet, gluten-free diet, thyroid hormones, gut microbiota, lifestyle medicine

1. Introduction: Understanding Hypothyroidism Beyond Hormone Replacement

Hypothyroidism is a chronic endocrine disorder characterised by insufficient production of thyroid hormones-thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3). It affects approximately 5-10% of the population worldwide and is more prevalent in women and older adults [1,2]. Primary hypothyroidism, often caused by Hashimoto's thyroiditis in iodine-sufficient areas, can also arise from iodine deficiency, thyroid surgery, or radiation exposure [3].

Although levothyroxine therapy effectively normalises serum thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) in most patients, many continue to experience symptoms such as fatigue, cognitive decline, cold intolerance, and weight gain [4,5]. These unresolved symptoms underscore the need for a more integrative approach to care. Nutritional status, including deficiencies in key micronutrients like iodine, selenium, and vitamin D, may influence thyroid function, autoimmunity, and metabolism [6, 7]. Recent research has also identified a strong link between gut health, immune function, and thyroid regulation, particularly in autoimmune thyroiditis. This review aims to evaluate evidence-based nutritional interventions that can complement standard pharmacologic therapy for hypothyroidism.

2. Essential Micronutrients for Thyroid Hormone Synthesis and Regulation

Iodine is essential for the synthesis of T3 and T4, and both deficiency and excess are known to disrupt thyroid function [8,9]. Selenium plays a vital role in converting T4 to T3 and reducing oxidative stress in the thyroid gland [10,11]. Iron deficiency, particularly in menstruating women, can impair thyroid peroxidase (TPO) activity and reduce hormone production [12]. Zinc supports TSH function and thyroid receptor sensitivity [13]. Vitamin D modulates immune responses and is often deficient in individuals with Hashimoto's thyroiditis [14,15].

3. Dietary Patterns and Their Clinical Significance in Hypothyroidism

The Mediterranean diet, known for its anti-inflammatory effects, has shown benefits in reducing autoimmune markers and supporting metabolic health [16]. In patients with co-existing celiac disease or gluten sensitivity, a gluten-free diet has been linked to reduced thyroid antibody titers [17,18]. Low-glycemic and plant-based diets help regulate weight and improve insulin sensitivity, both of which are commonly affected in hypothyroidism [19,20].

4. Gut-Thyroid Axis: Influence of Microbiota on Endocrine and Immune Function

Emerging evidence suggests that gut microbiota influence thyroid function by affecting nutrient absorption and modulating immune activity [21,22]. Probiotic and prebiotic interventions have been proposed to support gut barrier integrity and modulate systemic inflammation, potentially benefiting thyroid patients [23].

5. Lifestyle Strategies for Optimising Thyroid Health

Exercise can improve metabolic rate and counteract weight gain associated with hypothyroidism [24]. Chronic stress and poor sleep disrupt the hypothalamic-pituitary-thyroid axis, further exacerbating symptoms. Mindfulness practices, cognitive behavioural therapy, and sleep hygiene are recommended adjuncts to traditional care [25,26].

6. Discussion: Clinical Application and Future Directions

Nutritional therapy offers a valuable adjunct to pharmacological treatment in hypothyroidism. While levothyroxine remains the mainstay, addressing nutrient deficiencies and adopting anti-inflammatory diets can significantly improve patient outcomes. Selenium and vitamin D supplementation have shown the strongest evidence in reducing autoimmunity [10,15]. The Mediterranean and gluten-free diets demonstrate potential in modulating immune responses. The role of the gut-thyroid axis is increasingly recognised, suggesting that microbiota-targeted therapies may be an effective future strategy. However, more high-quality randomised controlled trials are needed to establish standardised protocols.

7. Conclusion

Nutritional and lifestyle factors play a crucial, yet often under recognised, role in the management of hypothyroidism. Addressing deficiencies in iodine, selenium, vitamin D, iron, and zinc, alongside anti-inflammatory diets and gut health support, can improve symptom control and overall quality of life. Personalised approaches that combine diet, micronutrient therapy, stress reduction, and pharmacologic treatment represent the future of comprehensive hypothyroidism care.

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