

“My Thyroid Function Is Not Normal”

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A well-educated woman in her mid 50s came to my clinic complaining of generalized fatigue, muscle and joints pain, depression and shortness of breath for the last 6 months. She was treated for fibromyalgia, arthritis, depression and emphysema without much improvement. On further questioning, she said that she had hyperfunctioning thyroid nodule removed two years ago. She was followed with thyroid function test after the surgery. She had no symptoms until 6 months ago when she was diagnosed with hypothyroidism with her thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) above 11. She was treated with low dose synthroid, but her symptoms did not improve, although her TSH had come down to the normal range. She noticed that she did not have any of the above-stated symptoms when her TSH was in the range of 1 to 2 in the past two years. She stated that her thyroid function was not normal even though her TSH was in the normal range. She also does not think that she has emphysema because she does not smoke and she does not have either asthma or any family history of lung diseases. After reviewing her medical records and repeating her lung function test, I agree with her that she does not have emphysema. I adjusted her thyroid hormone dosage. She came back in 4 weeks for follow-up with complete resolution of her symptoms. I congratulated on her that she was smart enough to identify and cure her problems.

Hypothyroidism is a very common disorder which is usually treated by replacement of thyroid hormone. The optimal dosage of the hormone should be individually determined by periodically following up TSH plus other thyroid tests and clinical evaluation. TSH alone is not an accurate test for measuring thyroid function because multiple drugs and disease processes can adversely impact on the TSH-secreting hypopituitary gland. The same principle applies to all endocrine disease management including diabetes, just as hemoglobin A1c is not the only test to follow up diabetes control. Inadequate supplement of thyroid hormone can lead to all symptoms mentioned above. If you have any questions about diagnosis and management of your thyroid disease, diabetes or even emphysema, please contact Dr. Jeff Ye, North Atlanta Medical & Digestive Care at 770-346-0900. We can help!