

The Thyroid and Brain Connection related to Mental Conditions and Brain Dysfunction

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One of my consistent findings of my hypothyroid patients is the remarkable rate of aging. This is quite insightful, as a number of the effects of thyroid hormone deficiencies analogous to aging. As you age, your memory, concentration, and ability to process new information gradually become impaired. Hypothyroidism also causes a reduction in physical exercise, both because of direct effects on muscle function and because of how it impairs mood and emotions, in a way that mirrors how people often tend to become more sedentary with advancing years.

In fact, the normal aging process may be related to some extent to a naturally occurring decrease in thyroid hormone activity in the body. For example, the size of the thyroid gland decreases with age, and its structure and function also deteriorate gradually. The amount of the most active form of thyroid hormone (Free T3) in tissues decreases. This explains why the basal metabolic rate, which is highly regulated by the thyroid hormone, also decreases with age. By the age of eighty-five, your basal metabolic rate has dropped to 52 percent of the levels you had at age 3. As a result, normal physiological responses requiring thyroid hormone become less efficient. As you get older, you may have a more difficult time regulating your body temperature during extreme heat or cold. As you are getting older, thyroid hormone deficit in your organs also promotes a slowing of the production/synthesis of essential proteins in your body, a hallmark of the aging process. This natural decline in thyroid hormone activity with age could conceivably contribute to a normal aging process.

As you get older, you may be more vulnerable to serious mental and emotional problems when the thyroid gland becomes minimally underactive. In addition to depression and impaired cognitive abilities, which are quite common among older people afflicted with even minor thyroid hormone deficit, a profound and severe slowing of mental activity can occur if your underactive thyroid is severe enough and is not corrected promptly. This slowing of mental activity may become extreme and lead to dementia. Dementia due to hypothyroidism OR under active thyroid disease is caused by disruption in the brain structures that support recent memory, concentration and problem solving.

Occasionally, family members bring patient to my office because the person effected has become increasing withdrawn and has been showing extreme slowing of mental activity. Even today, with the increased awareness of the frequency and effects of thyroid diseases, we continue to see older patients (**50 years old or older**) who progress to a state of dementia caused by severe hypothyroidism. Most patients with dementia are unaware of what is happening to them. Because Alzheimer's disease is one of the most common causes of dementia in older people, some patients diagnosed with dementia are thought to have Alzheimer's disease when in fact the dementia has been caused by an underactive thyroid gland that has NOT been diagnosed or treated for a long period of time.

The similarities between dementia caused by Alzheimer's disease and dementia caused by hypothyroidism led scientists to study whether patients with Alzheimer's disease are more likely to have a thyroid imbalance. ***It turned out that both patients and unaffected relatives of patients with familial Alzheimer's disease have a high frequency of Hashimoto's thyroiditis and hypothyroidism.*** The association between Hashimoto's thyroiditis and familial Alzheimer's disease appears to be ***genetically mediated***. Hypothyroidism may place a person with Alzheimer's disease at a high risk for having more mental and cognitive deficits. Consequently, if you are diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, your traditional doctor should **test** you for hypothyroidism and Hashimoto's thyroiditis so that proper thyroid treatment will slow the cognitive deterioration if you test positive to be hypothyroid.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of practicing physicians do NOT properly test nor evaluate the thyroid gland properly. Due to monetary constraints from third party payers (Insurance Companies) the vast majority of patients are NOT properly tested for thyroid disease or conditions of the thyroid gland which leads to much more mental and cognitive conditions later in life. One must seek out a highly trained and skilled physician in Integrative/Functional medicine to properly evaluate and diagnosis thyroid conditions to prevent the needless pain and suffering of dementia, Alzheimer's disease and many other life threatening conditions which occur with an underactive or undiagnosed thyroid condition(s). The prudent and skilled physician should find the causes of the thyroid dysfunction NOT just treat the symptoms with synthetic thyroid hormones. This is a great disservice to the American Public and a truly unnecessary burden to place on humanity due to lack of knowledge and proper care.

Therefore, as noted earlier, minor thyroid imbalances often produce greater effects in the elderly than in the young people, and physicians often achieve spectacular results with adequate treatment. Proper thyroid treatment prevents deterioration of cognition and the occurrence of depressive mood in older patients with low-grade hypothyroidism. The ever increasing frequency of hypothyroidism among older people and the similarities between symptoms of hypothyroidism and changes characteristic of the normal aging process attest to the importance of performing the proper thyroid tests on older people ***(50 and above)*** who have noticeable changes in mood, emotions or behavior.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Badanek to discuss issues mentioned in this article OR any other current health challenges you may be experiencing with little to no resolve with traditional medical care, please call us at: 352-622-1151 to schedule an appointment. Go to our websites: at DrBadanek.com or alternativewholistichealth.com for further information about our facility.