



Thyroid Awareness Month: Check Your Neck, Change Your Life

January is Thyroid Awareness Month. Upwards of 60 million Americans suffer from thyroid disease -- and the majority of them are undiagnosed and untreated. To help, the nation's leading thyroid patient advocate/author, Mary Shomon, has put together the Check Your Neck, Change Your Life campaign, along with a free e-book guide to thyroid symptoms, disorders, and treatments.

Kensington, MD ([PRWEB](#)) January 12, 2009 -- It's January, and that means it's Thyroid Awareness Month. And this year, in 2009, there is no better time to check your neck to change your life.

Some health experts estimate that upwards of 60 million Americans are suffering from thyroid disease -- but because thyroid problems can be tricky to recognize and diagnose for patients and doctors -- the majority of sufferers are not yet even diagnosed. In the past year, one of America's most famous celebrities, Oprah Winfrey, even went public about her own thyroid problem and resulting 40-pound weight gain.

According to thyroid patient advocate and author Mary Shomon, "Millions of people have an undiagnosed thyroid disorder, and don't realize that it is the source of the other health challenges they face. Obesity, depression, fatigue, high cholesterol, infertility, low sex drive, and many other conditions are often the direct result of undiagnosed and untreated thyroid conditions."

To help these undiagnosed thyroid sufferers finally get the help they need, Shomon, the New York Times best-selling author of "The Thyroid Diet" and popular patient-directed books, web sites, and thyroid newsletters, has put together the "Check Your Neck, Change Your Life" campaign, along with a free downloadable ebook -- all designed to help educate and empower people about how to get a proper thyroid diagnosis.

The free ebook, titled "The Thyroid Awareness Month Guide to Thyroid Disease," is available at the Thyroid Awareness Month campaign website [<http://www.thyroidawarenessmonth.com>].

Patient advocate Mary Shomon has developed the following tips on how to "Check Your Neck, Change Your Life."

1. Think Thyroid

The thyroid gland has an impact on so many health issues, and can cause a variety of symptoms. If you are overweight, and can't lose weight despite diet and exercise -- think thyroid. If you are suffering from infertility or recurrent miscarriage, think thyroid. If you have a low sex drive -- think thyroid. If you are depressed -- think thyroid. If you are feeling fuzzy-brained and having memory problems -- think thyroid. If you've just had a baby and you're exhausted, losing hair, or having trouble breastfeeding -- think thyroid. If you have menstrual problems, or are going through a difficult menopause -- think thyroid. If you have muscle aches, joint pains, hair loss, puffiness, or constipation -- think thyroid. If you suspect a problem with your "hormones" -- think thyroid. And especially, if you are a women suffering from any vague symptom -- think thyroid!

According to Shomon, "There's a temptation for patients -- and doctors -- to assume that seemingly vague symptoms like fatigue, aches and pains, depression, or weight gain, are due to age, lifestyle, or stress. But given the prevalence of undiagnosed thyroid problems, we owe it to ourselves to rule out a thyroid problem. And



patients need to realize that they often have to bring up thyroid issues, because doctors frequently don't."

A printable list of thyroid disease risk factors and symptoms is featured online at <http://www.thyroidawarenessmonth.com/thyroid-symptoms.htm>.

2. Check Your Own Neck

You can potentially detect a thyroid abnormality early by follow these steps to check your neck.

1. Stand in front of a mirror
2. Stretch your neck back
3. Swallow water
4. Look for enlargement in your neck (below the Adam's Apple, above the collar bone)
5. Feel the area to confirm enlargement or bump
6. If any problem is detected, see an doctor

Says Shomon, "There are definitely people who have discovered their own thyroid problems after noticing a lump or swelling in the neck, where the thyroid gland is located. But remember that checking your neck is similar to breast self-exams, in that it's not conclusive. So a thorough examination by a physician is always needed to diagnose or rule out thyroid disease."

3. Get the Right Blood Tests

When it comes to thyroid diagnosis, most conventional doctors rely on the TSH -- Thyroid Stimulating Hormone -- test. But keep in mind, the "typical" normal range, which runs from about .5 to 5.5, is controversial. Many endocrinologists and physicians believe that levels above 2.5 are evidence of a thyroid condition. Millions of people, however, fall into the limbo between 2.5 and 5.5, where doctors wrongly claim they are "normal," and fail to diagnose and treat symptoms. If you don't feel well, and your TSH is in "limbo" and your doctor won't treat you, get another opinion. Also, keep in mind that forward-thinking doctors don't just test TSH, they test Free T4, Free T3 to get a more complete picture of thyroid function. A thyroid autoimmune antibodies panel can also identify thyroid diseases as well. So ask your physician for these additional blood tests, and consider treatment if levels are borderline or abnormal.

Says Shomon, "Unfortunately, some patients are unable to get anything but a TSH test. If that's the situation, many patients don't realize that in most states, they can actually order their own thyroid blood tests without their doctor's involvement. It gives people an option if they're being stonewalled by doctors, insurance companies or HMOs."

Patients who want information on ordering their own thyroid tests can visit <http://www.thyroidawarenessmonth.com/tshtest.htm> online.

4. Get a Thorough Clinical Thyroid Examination

Blood tests are only a part of the equation. The challenging part of thyroid diagnosis comes in the clinical thyroid exam. During a thorough thyroid exam, the doctor include:

- * Feel (known as "palpate") your neck for thyroid abnormalities
- * Listen to your thyroid using a stethoscope.

- * Test your reflexes
- * Check your heart rate, rhythm and blood pressure
- * Measure your weight, and discuss changes
- * Measure body temperature
- * Examine your face for puffiness and eyebrow loss
- * Examine your eyes for protrusion, eyelid retraction and other potentially thyroid-related signs
- * Discuss changes in the quality/quantity of your hair
- * Examine your skin, for hives, lesions or roughness on the shins, and blister-like bumps on the face
- * Note any tremor, shakiness, slowness in movement or speech, hoarseness of voice, and swelling of hands/feet
- * Discuss your personal and family history of thyroid and autoimmune disease
- * Listen carefully to your medical history, and your symptoms

"A doctor who doesn't do a complete clinical thyroid exam," says Shomon, "is shortchanging patients, and will miss many cases of thyroid disease. Unfortunately, in this day of managed care and 5 minute doctor visits, patients may have to push for the doctor to actually perform a full thyroid exam."

5. Find a Doctor Who Has the Complete Picture

When it comes to thyroid disease diagnosis and treatment, most practitioners fall into one of two camps. On one side are the conventional endocrinologists and physicians, who believe that thyroid problems should be diagnosed solely by a TSH test, and treated solely by the synthetic thyroid medication levothyroxine (i.e., Synthroid). These doctors are most concerned with normalizing blood test results, not whether patients feel well and symptoms are relieved. The other side includes integrative physicians, some gynecologists and hormone experts, and many holistic practitioners who believe that thyroid problems are diagnosed by evaluating symptoms, a clinical exam, taking a complete medical history, and results of a variety of relevant thyroid tests. These practitioners also believe that treating thyroid disease means finding the best thyroid medication -- which can include the addition of medications like Cytomel or time-released T3, or natural desiccated thyroid like Armour and Nature-throid rather than levothyroxine -- that can safely treat each patient and resolve symptoms.

Says Shomon, "Finding the right is crucial. For those who want a jumpstart in getting the right doctor, I have put together a free online [Thyroid Top Doctors Directory](#) to help find doctors who are recommended by fellow thyroid patients.

Download a Free Ebook:

The Thyroid Awareness Month Guide to Thyroid Disease is a free ebook from Mary Shomon, available for download at <http://www.thyroidawarenessmonth.com/ebook.htm> online. The ebook explains more about the thyroid and its function, and looks at common thyroid diseases and conditions, including hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid), hyperthyroidism (an overactive thyroid), autoimmune thyroid disease, goiter/enlargement, nodules/lumps, thyroiditis, and thyroid cancer. The ebook features a detailed list of risk factors, signs and symptoms of thyroid disease, along with information thyroid blood tests, diagnosis and treatment. Finally, links to key thyroid-related websites, and resources to help you stay informed, are included at the [Thyroid Awareness Month web site](#).

Mary Shomon is the nation's leading thyroid patient advocate. She is author of 10 popular books on health, including New York Times best-selling "The Thyroid Diet: Manage Your Metabolism for Lasting Weight Loss," "The Thyroid Hormone Breakthrough: Overcoming Sexual and Hormonal Problems at Every Age," "Living Well With Hypothyroidism: What Your Doctor Doesn't Tell You...That You Need to Know," "The



Thyroid Guide to Hair Loss," "Living Well With Graves' Disease and Hyperthyroidism," "Living Well With Autoimmune Disease," and "Living Well With Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia." Shomon is founder and editor of a popular thyroid website, <http://www.Thyroid-Info.com>, and edits an email and print newsletter and magazine for thyroid patients , "Sticking Out Our Necks: Thyroid Report." Since 1997, Shomon has also served as the Guide to Thyroid Disease at About.com, a New York Times Company. More information on Mary Shomon and thyroid disease is online at <http://www.thyroid-info.com> and <http://www.thyroidawarenessmonth.com> -- two of Shomon's advocacy sites.

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