

MANAGING GRAVES' DISEASE THROUGH DIET AND EXERCISE

In partnership with POTENTRx

March 2015

What is Graves' Disease?

Graves' disease is an immune system disorder that leads to the overproduction of thyroid hormones (hyperthyroidism) and is the most common cause of hyperthyroidism. The body's natural defense system that normally attacks foreign substances creates antibodies that attack certain cells in the thyroid causing it to produce an excess of thyroid hormones.

Know Your Facts!

Q: What are the symptoms of Graves' disease?

A: Common symptoms of Graves' disease include: anxiety and irritability, a fine tremor of your hands and fingers, heat sensitivity and an increase in perspiration or warm, moist skin, weight loss despite normal eating habits, enlarged thyroid gland, change in menstrual cycles, reduced libido, frequent bowel movements, bulging eyes (Graves' ophthalmopathy), thick red skin usually on the shins or top of the feet, and rapid and irregular heartbeat.

Q: What is Graves' ophthalmopathy?

A: About 30% of those with Graves' disease develop Graves' ophthalmopathy because the antibodies that attack the thyroid also attack the eyes. This can lead to bulging eyes, gritty sensation, pressure or pain, puffy or retracted eyelids, reddening or inflammation, light sensitivity, double vision, or vision loss.

Q: What is the cause of Graves' disease?

A: The cause of Graves' disease is undetermined, but it is known to be hereditary and is more common in women.

Q: How is Graves' disease diagnosed?

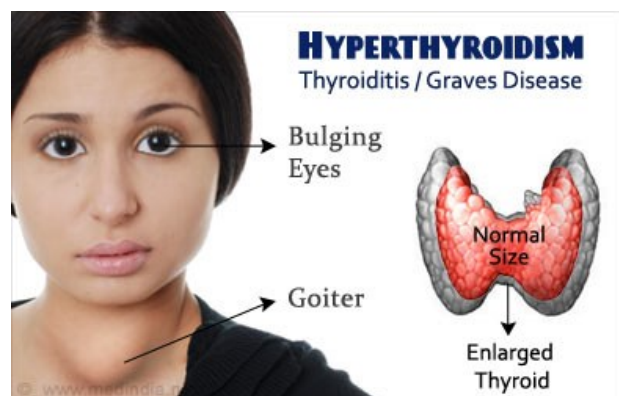
A: If a physician suspects that you have Graves' disease, a simple physical assessment will usually be enough for the physician to detect the symptoms. Then, a lab test will be ordered to measure the amount of thyroid hormones in your blood.

Q: Is there anything I can do to control my hyperthyroidism aside from taking medication?

A: Yes! There are some modifiable risk factors that contribute to hyperthyroidism. Please refer to the reverse side for lifestyle changes that can help to relieve hyperthyroidism.

One in every eight women will have a thyroid disorder in their lifetime.

Thyroid.org, 2015





What Can Lifestyle Changes Do For Graves' Disease?

There are many effective lifestyle changes to manage Graves' disease — Graves' disease may cause you to experience weight loss or muscle wasting, so an increase in caloric intake may compensate for the hyperthyroidism induced high metabolism. Conversely, once you start treating your hyperthyroidism, you may start to put on weight. A diet consisting of low calorie, nutrient dense food like vegetables and fruits may be beneficial post-treatment. You should also make sure to consume adequate amounts of vitamin D and calcium because Graves' disease may contribute to osteoporosis. Overall, one should eat a healthy, balanced diet to give your body the nutrients it needs to function optimally. Additionally, Graves' disease may be caused by significant levels of stress, so stress reduction is another lifestyle change that can be beneficial. You should identify your stressors and strive to avoid or remove those stressors from your life.



Factors of Graves' Disease

There is no one, definite cause of Graves' disease, but the following are known to increase risk for Graves' disease:

Modifiable Risk Factors

Smoking and emotional or physical stress.

Non-Modifiable Risk Factors

Family history of thyroid issues, gender (women are more likely to develop Graves' disease), other autoimmune disorders such as type 1 diabetes or rheumatic arthritis, and pregnancy.

What Can Exercise Do For Graves' disease?

Regular, structured exercise can have positive effects for those with Graves' disease. A program of walking, stretching, and strengthening can improve aerobic capacity, reduce fatigue, and normalize thyroid hormone levels in both the short and long term. It is recommended to exercise 5 times a week with brisk walking for 45-60 minutes, in addition to stretching and strengthening for an additional 45 minutes. The stretching and strengthening should involve all the major muscle groups. The strengthening program can be done with body weight or with added resistance, and should consist of 8-12 repetitions of 1-3 sets. Increase the number of repetitions and sets to increase the intensity as you get stronger.