

Thyroid Treatment

Thyroid hormone regulates the body and brain, including many symptoms of depression such as appetite, energy and motivation. Low thyroid is a common medical problem which can be treated by taking additional supplement of this hormone.

Thyroid hormone can also be used to enhance the effects of antidepressant treatment even when your thyroid levels are in the normal range. For example, studies have found that lithium works best when the thyroid-TSH level is close to the middle of the range (around 2.5). Thyroid augmentation is also one of the best-studied strategies for helping antidepressants work better.

There are two types of thyroid supplement used in psychiatry, T3 (or cytomel) and T4 (or synthroid). The risks and benefits with these are similar. T3 may be more active in the brain.

How to take thyroid medicine

Take thyroid medicine on an empty stomach. Do not take it at the same time as your other medications and vitamins (it's best to take least 4 hours apart otherwise they may interfere with its absorption). However, these are just ideals – if you can't get it in at the right time still take it. Most will be absorbed.

The dose is guided by your lab results. The main lab test for thyroid is the TSH level (a high TSH means your thyroid levels are low, while a low TSH means they are high).

Side effects and risks

Side effects of thyroid treatment can include anxiety, tremor and weight loss. There are medical risks associated with using thyroid supplementation to enhance your antidepressant treatment (that is, taking extra thyroid when your levels were normal to begin with). These risks are:

- 1) Osteoporosis: this is when your bone mineral density is lower. It can increase the risk of bone fractures. Your risk of osteoporosis is also elevated if you are older, went through early menopause, took corticosteroids for prolonged periods, or have a family history of osteoporosis.
- 2) Atrial fibrillation: an abnormal fluttering of the heart. Symptoms of this include: Palpitations (racing, uncomfortable, or irregular heartbeat), chest pain, shortness of breath, lightheadedness and low blood pressure.

Drug interactions

The following drugs may decrease your levels of thyroid medicine: Antacids, iron, calcium and carbamazepine.

–Chris Aiken, MD, Updated 3/10/2025