

# Foods That Help or Hurt Your Thyroid



## Salt

Your thyroid needs iodine to work well. Most people in the U.S. easily get enough of this element from their diet, usually through fish and dairy products. Make sure you're using iodized table salt at home. You can tell by looking at the label. Sea salt and the salt used in packaged or processed foods usually aren't iodized.



## Leafy Greens

Spinach, lettuce, and other leafy greens are great sources of magnesium, an all-star mineral that plays a huge role in your body processes. Fatigue, muscle cramps, and changes in your heartbeat could be signs that you're not getting enough.



## Nuts

Cashews, almonds, and pumpkin seeds are excellent sources of iron. Brazil nuts help your thyroid in two ways. Not only are they a good source of iron, but they're also rich in selenium, another mineral that supports the thyroid. Just a few each day give you the selenium you need.



## Seafood

Fish, shrimp, and seaweed are great sources of iodine. You need iodine for a healthy thyroid, but avoid large amounts of kelp if you have a thyroid problem. Kelp is high in iodine and may make your condition worse.



## **Kale**

Could kale, that superstar among superfoods, actually not be quite so awesome? Kale is a mild goitrogen -- in rare cases it prevents the thyroid from getting enough iodine. But kale should not be a problem for you unless you get very little iodine in your diet and you're eating large amounts of kale. This is also the case for cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts.



## **Soy**

In rare cases, some of the chemicals found in soy products like soy milk or edamame could hurt the thyroid's ability to make hormones, but only if you're not getting enough iodine and you eat large amounts. Just like with kale, if your iodine levels are OK, you probably don't need to worry about eating soy.



## **Organ Meats**

If you eat organ meats like kidneys, heart, or liver, you might get a lot of lipoic acid, which is a fatty acid found in these and some other foods. You can also buy it as a supplement. But if you get too much, it could disrupt the way your thyroid works. Lipoic acid could also have an effect on any thyroid medicines you take.



## **Gluten and Your Thyroid**

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley. Unless you have been diagnosed with celiac disease, it probably won't affect your thyroid. Gluten can damage the small intestines of people with celiac disease. That damage can cause serious problems and is linked to an increased risk of Hashimoto's disease (which leads to an underactive thyroid) and Graves' disease (which leads to an overactive thyroid). If you have celiac disease, sticking to a gluten-free diet may help prevent these thyroid diseases.



## Thyroid Medication and Your Food

The foods you eat can affect your thyroid medicine. They can slow down how fast or how well your body absorbs medicine.

- Take medicine on an empty stomach, preferably in the morning.
- Some vitamins and antacids can also prevent your medicine from working.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

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## Do Natural Treatments Work for Hypothyroidism?

By Kara Mayer Robinson

*Eating specific foods or taking supplements won't help you control hypothyroidism, but they can make you feel better, lower your stress, and prevent disease.*

Make sure you keep up with the hormone medication your doctor prescribes. Natural treatments can't replace the traditional ones.

### Keep Up a Healthy Diet

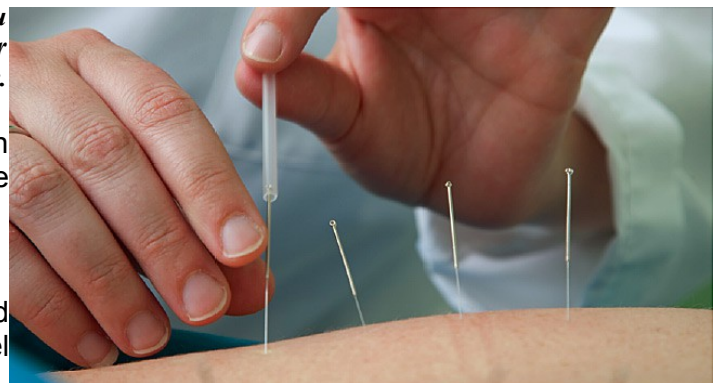
There's no special meal plan for managing thyroid disease. But a well-balanced diet can help you feel good and ward off disease.

It's best to follow the healthy eating guide recommended by the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, says Jeffrey Mechanick, MD, an endocrinologist with the American Thyroid Association.

The key to eating well is balance, he says. Don't eat too much of any single type of food, even if it's a healthy food or something you heard may be good for thyroid disease. No specific foods are particularly good for thyroid disease, he says, and eating too much of any food isn't good for you.

Choose a wide range of fruits and vegetables. Eat colorful ones like berries and grapes, which are high in healthy antioxidants.

Limit foods with saturated fat like red meat. Try eating seafood, which is high in healthy omega-3 fatty acids, at least twice a week.



## ▪ Foods That Raise Questions

Some foods may affect your treatment or the way your thyroid works:

- **Soy and coffee:**

It may lower your body's ability to use hormone medication.

You don't have to avoid them entirely, but don't eat or drink them close to the time when you take your medication. So if you take your pills in the morning, wait until later in the day to have soy sauce, soy milk, tofu or coffee.

- **Kelp and seaweed.**

You may have heard that you should stay away from them because they're high in iodine, which can interfere with your thyroid.

But experts don't agree. Alan Christianson, NMD, co-author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Thyroid Disease*, says most seaweed, like nori, wakame, and hijiki, are safe and good for you. He does caution against kelp, which has higher levels of iodine. "With kelp, it's hard to not get too much," he says.

Mechanick says it's all about moderation. "It's OK to eat these," he says. "Just don't overeat them."

- **Kale, broccoli, spinach.**

These foods are also high in iodine, though not so high that you need to avoid them. But go easy. Too much can make your condition worse.

- **Supplements**

- "There's no proven role for dietary supplements in the treatment or management of true hypothyroidism," Mechanick says. So if you've heard that a certain one may help you, it's probably not true.

- Supplements may also interfere with your treatment and can be harmful. Iodine supplements, for example, can cause your thyroid to make too much or too little hormone. Too much of a healthy vitamin isn't good for you. Fiber supplements can absorb medication and keep the full dose from working in your body. Herbs may interfere with your medication and may not be safe or effective.

- Don't take supplements without talking to your doctor.

- **Complementary Treatments**

Some may lower stress and help you relax. They can't replace conventional treatment, though. So use these in addition to your regular treatment, not instead of it.

- **Acupuncture.**

It may improve your symptoms and your response to your regular treatment. Plus, it's good for your immune system, Christianson says.

- **Yoga.**

It's good for relaxation, Mechanick says. It hasn't been scientifically proven, but it may also improve blood flow to your thyroid gland.

- **Meditation.**

This may also relax you. There's no risk as long as you continue with your regular hypothyroidism treatment.

- **Contrast hydrotherapy.**

This involves applying hot and cold towels to your neck and throat at different times. It may help stimulate the thyroid, but it hasn't been proven.

### WebMD Feature

Reviewed by [Minesh Khatri, MD](#) on November 13, 2016

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