

## FOR YOUR HEALTH

# After diagnosis, thyroid problems are easily treatable

BY NASER JAMAL

The thyroid gland secretes hormones that are essential to controlling metabolism. If the gland produces too much (hyperthyroidism) or too little (hypothyroidism) of these hormones, health problems will arise.

Both hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism are very common -- and treatable. Roughly one in five women will have a thyroid issue at some point in her life. These conditions can develop at any time, but they often develop after a woman gives birth.

How is a thyroid condition diagnosed?

Both hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism are diagnosed through a simple blood test. While sudden and drastic change in thyroid function is possible, a progressive decline in function is more common. Your doctor may order a blood test if he or she suspects a thyroid condition.

There seems to be a genetic link to thyroid problems, so let your doctor know if you have family with thyroid issues or diabetes. If you have a thyroid issue, other glands in your body, such as those that produce estrogen, testosterone or insulin, may also stop functioning properly.

What are the signs of hypothyroidism? How is it treated?

Potential symptoms include weight gain, being tired despite getting enough rest, depression, constipation and a change in hair texture. Left untreated, a thyroid problem could lead

to swelling (edema), carpal tunnel syndrome, sleep apnea, dementia or congestive heart failure.

Hypothyroidism is treated with a daily pill that contains a synthetic hormone. You will need to take this medication for life because your body does not naturally produce enough hormone. Your doctor will also perform blood tests once or twice a year to confirm that your hormone dosage is still working.

What are the signs of hyperthyroidism? How is it treated?

Potential symptoms include feeling hot all the time, losing weight without trying, loose bowel movements, feeling anxious or irritable and a change in hair texture. People with long-standing hyperthyroidism may develop an irreversible bulging of the eyes or irregular heart rhythms. Left untreated, hyperthyroidism can lead to worsened asthma, tremors, diarrhea and even congestive heart failure.

Several disorders can cause hyperthyroidism, making it more difficult to treat than hypothyroidism. In many cases, medication will control the condition. But in some instances, surgery to remove part or all of the thyroid gland may be needed.

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## Horoscopes

by Holiday Mathis

**ARIES** (March 21-April 19). Believe in yourself enough to go forward even when everyone is giving you a puzzled look. It might take the others a little time to get enthusiastic about your ideas, but sooner or later they will catch on.

**TAURUS** (April 20-May 20). There are plenty of people who would like to know you, to be a part of your journey and help you in any way they can. Open your heart and you will immediately broaden your support base.

**GEMINI** (May 21-June 21). Commit yourself to a difficult project and what follows is pure magic. It will feel as though someone else is working through you to accomplish what you couldn't do alone.

**CANCER** (June 22-July 22). A relationship that has gone awry can be fixed. You don't have to work on this directly. Avoid the question "Can I talk to you?" That makes others defensive. Start the healing in your heart and your imagination.

**LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22). Prosperous people are quietly looking for someone with whom to share their fortune. You appeal to these types, not because you are needy, but because you are attempting self-sufficiency with comparatively small resources.

**VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Ever the diplomat, you've been agreeable to most of the terms of a relationship, spoken and unspoken. Now it's your turn to be assertive. Take this relationship where you most want it to go.

**LIBRA** (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You want to know that another person will be loyal before you bestow the gift of your devotion. You will be most generous as soon as you determine that the other person has the capacity to love you back.

**SCORPIO** (Oct. 24-Nov.

### Today's birthday

This is the year to finally accomplish all those things on your "must do" list. A trip is in the future in the summer months and a love interest could be met on your travels. Cancers and Virgos want to be your friend. Your lucky numbers are: 5, 10, 2, 9 and 14.

21). Your concern for others is touching, though it will do little to improve the circumstances for you or them. Do what feeds you emotionally. It's the only way to make the world a better place.

**SAGITTARIUS** (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). If life is a game, you will prove today that you are on a winning streak. Your talent takes the game to a new level. Then your ingenuity kicks in and the game is elevated once again.

**CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). It's not difficult to do your work. What's difficult is getting past the suggestions that your brain comes up with for not doing it. You can't trust everything you think. Tell the mischief-maker in your mind to cut it out.

**AQUARIUS** (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You have reason to be proud of yourself for what you've accomplished socially. Your friendships are strong, your love connections even stronger. Take a moment to celebrate.

**PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20). Big challenges cause you to do strange things. You have an instinct to include people who are not technically qualified to assist you. Illogical choices such as this will later make sense to you.

## SPECIALISTS URGING

# newborn tests

for super-rare gene diseases

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — At his first birthday, John Klor couldn't sit up on his own. A few months later, he was cruising like any healthy toddler -- thanks to a special diet that's treating the North Carolina boy's mysterious disease.

What doctors initially called cerebral palsy instead was a rare metabolic disorder assaulting his brain and muscles, yet one that's treatable if caught in time.

Urged by John's family, Duke University researchers are working on a way to test newborns for this disease, called GAMT deficiency. It's part of a growing movement to add some of the rarest of rare illnesses -- with such names as bubble-boy disease, Pompe disease, Krabbe disease -- to the battery of screenings given to U.S. babies hours after birth.

"There's other children out there that can be helped and be saved," says Melissa Klor, John's mother.

But just how many illnesses can that tiny spot of blood pricked from a baby's heel really turn up? And not all are treatable, so when is population-wide testing appropriate?

"Families go through these odysseys of diagnosis" to learn what's wrong with a child, says Dr. Alan Fleischman of the March of Dimes, who's part of a government advisory committee studying what to add to the national screening list. Often, "they argue that they would have been better off knowing even if there were no treatments."

Since 2004, specialists have urged that every U.S. newborn be tested for 29 rare but devastating genetic diseases, using that single heel-prick of blood, to catch the fraction who need fast treatment to avoid retardation, severe illness, even death. States gradually adopted those recommendations, and federal health officials say the testing catches about 5,000 babies a year with disorders ranging from sickle cell anemia to maple syrup urine disease and others with such tongue-twisting names that they go by acronyms like LCHAD.

John Klor's illness is too new for that list.

By the time her son was 6 months old, Melissa Klor knew something was wrong.



The Associated Press file (2009)

In this photo provided by the family, John Klor, then 16-months old, of Pine Knoll Shore, N.C., pushes a toy. Klor was diagnosed with a metabolic disorder

John missed developmental milestones, unable to sit, stop his head from wobbling, or babble. He regressed, quitting rolling over. He stared blankly for moments at a time, a kind of mini-seizure.

A neurologist diagnosed cerebral palsy. But John never had an MRI scan to prove the diagnosis, and Klor eventually sought a second opinion. Right after John's first birthday came the news: His brain scan showed no sign of cerebral palsy, but he might have any of a number of degenerative metabolic disorders.

In a lucky break, John's blood and urine were sent to Duke's genetics laboratory for specialized testing that found he couldn't process

protein correctly. John's body wasn't producing a substance called creatine that's crucial for providing energy to the brain and muscles, leading other protein metabolites to basically clog his system and damage his brain.

Creatine deficiency syndromes weren't discovered until 1994; Duke is one of the few labs able to diagnose them. Fortunately, John's version -- called GAMT deficiency for the enzyme, guanidinoacetate methyltransferase, that his body lacks -- is treatable in the young.

Doctors ordered a vegan diet -- only fruits, vegetables and specially processed pastas -- with no more than 6 grams of protein daily. John

drinks a formula containing creatine and other missing nutrients.

"Within days, we started to see him getting stronger," says Klor, of Pine Knoll Shore, N.C.

Today at 19 months, John runs and climbs stairs. He's starting to make sounds like "ma" but speech is coming more slowly; doctors are optimistic but make Klor no promises.

Only 40 cases of GAMT deficiency have been reported in medical journals, but Duke specialists say creatine disorders probably are underdiagnosed, with symptoms similar to other metabolic diseases. GAMT deficiency may eventually be a candidate for newborn screening

## ANNIE'S MAILBOX

## Parents nix college and I don't know why

**Dear Annie:** I began college in August, but my parents pulled me out after five weeks, saying they were convinced I would flunk out. Then they refused to talk to me -- as if I actually had failed.

Life with my family has become unbearable. I want to move out, but I need a job and can't find one. What can I do? — M.

**Dear M.:** Did your parents pull you out of school because you were doing too much partying and not enough studying? Are they having financial difficulties and could no longer afford your tuition? Do you still want to attend college?

Many college freshmen become distracted and do poorly. Unfortunately, your parents didn't give you much time to let things work themselves out. If you want to return to school, we suggest you check out your local community college and ask your parents to help you enroll in a few classes. If they see you are making a genuine effort to do well, they may agree to continue paying for your education. Otherwise, find

whatever small job you can, and start saving your money. You also can discuss with your parents the option of taking classes at a vocational school where you will be trained to have a useful career. Sitting home and complaining will get you nowhere, so start looking at the options for your future.

**Dear Annie:** I am in my early 30s and a stay-at-home mom of two small children. My husband works hard and tells me often that he loves me, but he never shows it. It's been more than 10 years since he bought me any kind of card or gift. I do all the housework and cook all meals, including cleaning up afterward. He says "thank you" every night, but even that gets stale after a while. I feel depressed and unappreciated.

I have purchased self-help books for him to read and have outright requested him to do things, to no avail. I have even told him I'm depressed. He will listen, but the next morning all is forgotten. I don't know how to get through to him.

How do I deal with the loneliness? We live in a rural area, and I don't know where to get free help. Please help. — Married and Alone

**Dear Married:** Your husband tells you often that he loves you and thanks you for what you do around the house, which is more than many women get. See if you can explain to him in your sweetest voice how much it would mean to you if he occasionally brought home a rose or a card. But if he won't cooperate, we suggest you buy yourself cards and gifts, sign his name and tell him "thank you."

You also need to find other outlets for your loneliness if your husband isn't capable of giving as much as you need. Make friends with other parents. Sign up for an evening art class, political lecture or church group, and ask Hubby to baby-sit. Form a book club. If that doesn't alleviate the problem, talk to your doctor. Your depression could be hormonal or chronic and require medication.

**Dear Annie:** Your readers might be able to spear-

head a movement in this country that would seriously cut down on spreading the flu and may even save lives.

We need a socially appropriate way to greet each other without touching. I like the Vulcan hand sign, although it requires practice. Here's another idea: Point the right elbow toward the person, with your right hand touching your left arm or shoulder, and nod. The facial expression can indicate how formal it is. — Windsor, Maine

**Dear Windsor:** The elbow idea seems rather military, and most ordinary folks can't manage the Vulcan hand sign, but you make a good point that a non-physical greeting can prevent the spread of germs. Live long and prosper.

*Annie's Mailbox is written by Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar, longtime editors of the Ann Landers column. Please e-mail your questions to anniesmailbox@comcast.net, or write to: Annie's Mailbox, P.O. Box 118190, Chicago, IL 60611.*