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Are Swimming Pools Sabotaging Your Thyroid?

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12/08/2016

Summer is in full swing, and if it's anywhere near as hot where you live as it is here in Texas, you're probably spending lots of time trying to cool down at the pool. While swimming can be a great way to escape the heat and socialize with family and friends, the chlorine in the water has the potential to disrupt your thyroid function. Let's take a look at how chlorine impacts your thyroid, and how to minimize its effects.

How Chlorine Impacts Your Thyroid Function

To understand how chlorine can impact your thyroid function, you need to know how your thyroid produces its hormones. In my book, The Thyroid Connection, I explain that iodine and tyrosine are the primary building blocks of thyroid hormones. Your thyroid converts tyrosine, an amino acid, into thyroglobulin and then attaches between one and four iodine molecules to create the four types of thyroid hormones, T1, T2, T3, and T4.

Because the highest concentration of iodine in your body is in our thyroid gland and iodine is so important for thyroid hormone production, your body is incredibly efficient at absorbing and storing iodine in the thyroid. Unfortunately, your thyroid isn't perfect at telling the difference between iodine and other substances with very similar chemical structures.

Iodine is part of the halogen family, which includes chlorine as well as fluorine and bromine. Halogens all fall into the same column of the periodic table, which, if you can remember back to your high school chemistry days, means they have very similar properties. Chlorine is similar enough to iodine that your thyroid will absorb and store it in

place of iodine, effectively “displacing” iodine.

As you know, your skin is your biggest organ and it absorbs many of the chemicals it comes into contact with. So every time you swim in a chlorinated pool (and take a bath or shower without a water filter), your skin absorbs the chlorine, allowing it to be taken up and stored in your thyroid.

Of course, just because chlorine looks like iodine doesn’t mean it can be used to make thyroid hormones. So if chlorine is displacing iodine, your ability to produce thyroid hormones is reduced, which can lead to low thyroid hormone levels and hypothyroidism. The higher the concentration of chlorine you have in your body, and the lower your iodine levels are, the more likely it is that your thyroid function will be negatively impacted.

How to Reduce Iodine Displacement Caused by Chlorine

If you have any type of thyroid dysfunction, I recommend limiting your time in chlorinated swimming pools, if possible. Saltwater pools can potentially be a safe alternative that still allow you to enjoy all the fun of summer swimming. You can also swim in natural bodies of water in the summer, which do not contain chlorine. If you are going to swim in a chlorinated pool, you can find out what day the pool gets treated and schedule your trips away from that day so that the chlorine levels are lower. Then, shower afterward using filtered water. I use a showerhead filter in my bathroom, and I also have tap filters installed in all of my sinks. You see, you’re not just being exposed to chlorine in swimming pools, it’s in our public water supply as well, meaning you’re getting a dose of chlorine and fluoride every time you drink from an unfiltered tap or take a shower from an unfiltered showerhead.

Of course the amount of chlorine you’re exposed to each time is very small, but research has shown that the cumulative effect of this exposure overtime can have a serious impact on your health. That’s why I recommend for everyone to filter the water in their homes. Aquasana even offers a special discount for all of my readers, just use the code DRMYERS at checkout to save 30% on your order!

In addition to limiting your chlorine exposure, you’ll want to make sure you’re maintaining sufficient levels of iodine. If your thyroid has plenty of iodine, it is much less likely to absorb chlorine in its place. Sea vegetables and saltwater fish are both naturally rich in iodine, and can be eaten to boost dietary iodine levels. Organic seaweed such as kelp and nori are great as snacks or in sushi, and kelp noodles are an excellent gluten-free pasta alternative that are packed with iodine. If you have known thyroid dysfunction or suspect you do, I would recommend reading my book, The Thyroid Connection, which has a 28-day program complete with meal plans and iodine-rich and thyroid-supporting recipes. It also takes a deeper dive into other root causes of thyroid dysfunction and a step-by-step plan to recover.

I also recommend taking an iodine supplement and/or a high-quality multivitamin that includes iodine. I carry a thyroid support supplement in my store that includes both iodine and tyrosine, so that you’re getting both of the two building blocks of your thyroid hormones.

If you look at the labels on those two supplements, you’ll see that, combined, they only total 375 micrograms per day. Like I said, your body is extremely efficient at finding and storing iodine, so you don’t require very much of it. I recommend keeping dietary and supplemental iodine intake between 150 and 450 mcg daily.

Restore Thyroid Function & Take Your Health Back

In my new book, The Thyroid Connection, I cover everything you need to know about thyroid disease, including its true underlying causes, how to work with your doctor, how to choose the right medication, and a 28-day program to get your life back.