

# Thyroid disease – What every new mother should know



## Did you know?

- The thyroid gland controls metabolism and plays an important role in reproduction and fertility.<sup>1</sup>
- In mothers, problems of the thyroid may be more common than you might think.<sup>2</sup>
- Couples having infertility problems and pregnant women should speak to their doctor about thyroid testing and iodine intake.

## Common thyroid problems

Women most frequently suffer from either an underactive thyroid (**hypothyroidism**) which slows down metabolism, or an overactive thyroid (**hyperthyroidism**) which causes the metabolism to speed up.<sup>3,4</sup>

## Thyroid disease and pregnancy

All expectant mothers should ideally have their thyroid checked at least once in early stages of pregnancy.

Why? Because untreated thyroid problems increase the risk of premature or still birth, as well as learning and development problems for the baby in the future.<sup>5,6</sup>

## Advice for new mothers

Some new mothers can develop problems with their thyroid within the first year after giving birth – postpartum thyroiditis (PPT).<sup>8</sup>

## Iodine – know the facts

Iodine is vital for a fertile and healthy body; too little iodine in your diet can result in your thyroid becoming underactive.<sup>7</sup>

Iodine can be found in food products such as sea fish/food, bread, cheese, cow's milk, eggs and yoghurt.<sup>7</sup> In addition, expectant mums and breast feeding women should take a nutritional supplement containing iodine every day.<sup>7</sup>

- Women of childbearing age should consume 150 micrograms of iodine a day.<sup>8</sup>
- Pregnant and breast feeding women should consume 250 micrograms of iodine a day to ensure their baby's thyroid develops properly.<sup>8</sup>

PPT is often a transient condition and most women find the problem resolves itself within a year of giving birth.<sup>8</sup>

## What to look for?

Thyroid problems during and after pregnancy can be easily dismissed as just normal changes to the body, so seek medical help if you experience, or are worried about any of the symptoms below.

### Key symptoms of an underactive thyroid:<sup>3,9</sup>

- Fatigue
- Depression
- Joint or muscle pain
- Impaired memory
- Cold intolerance

### Key symptoms of an overactive thyroid:<sup>4,10</sup>

- Weight loss or no weight increase at pregnancy
- Irritability and anxiety
- High heart rate
- Trembling hands
- Staring eyes

## Help is at hand

Treating thyroid problems both during and after pregnancy is essential. However, thankfully treatment is straight forward, well-established and highly effective.

### An underactive thyroid:

- **Hypothyroidism** is treated by replacing the missing thyroid hormone with a medication – levothyroxine is taken orally and is suitable for pregnant women and new mothers.

### An overactive thyroid:

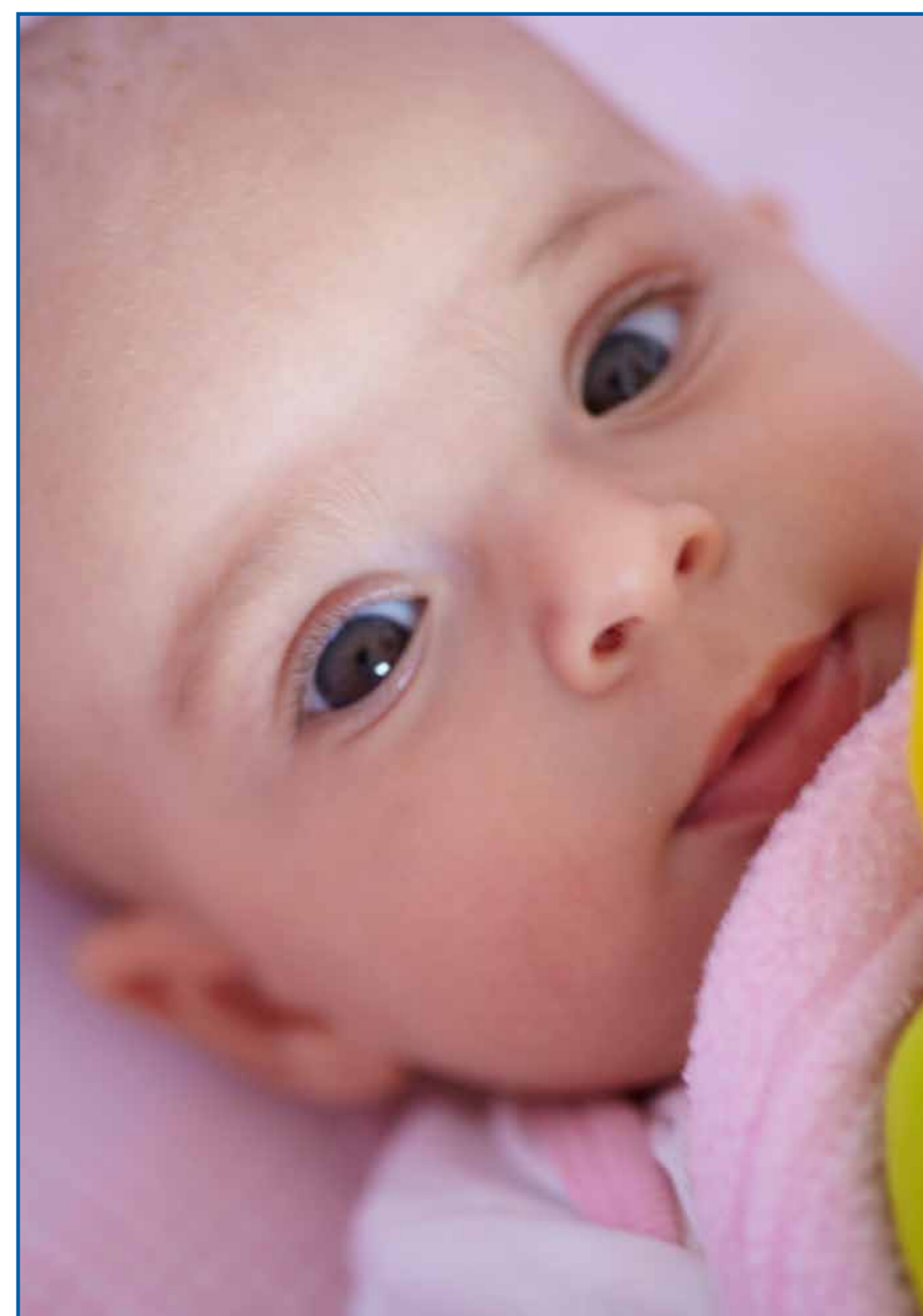
- **Hyperthyroidism** is treated to reduce the amount of thyroid hormone present in the blood stream.

- Pregnant women with mild disease are usually monitored without treatment, assuming mother and baby are well.<sup>11</sup>
- Expectant and new mothers with severe hyperthyroidism may be treated with anti-thyroid medication or surgery to partially remove the thyroid gland.<sup>11</sup>

## For further information

If you would like any further information on thyroid problems, please visit the following websites:

- [www.thyroidweek.com](http://www.thyroidweek.com)
- [www.thyroid-fed.org](http://www.thyroid-fed.org)



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