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How to Avoid Foods That are Harmful to Your Thyroid

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Your thyroid is a small, butterfly-shaped gland in the front of your neck. It releases hormones that control metabolism (how your body gets energy from the food you eat), and if this process becomes interrupted it can lead to heart disease, osteoporosis, infertility and, in rare cases, even coma and death. More specifically, your thyroid produces two main hormones thyroxine (T-4) and triiodothyronine (T-3), which are responsible for:

- Maintaining the rate at which your body uses fats and carbohydrates
- Helping control your body temperature
- Influencing your heart rate
- Helping to regulate the production of protein

Your thyroid also produces a hormone that regulates the amount of calcium in your blood.

Women over 50 are most likely to have hypothyroidism.

Hypothyroidism: The Most Common Thyroid Disease
Thyroid disease, which impacts 27 million Americans according to the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, can cause your thyroid to use energy more quickly (hyperthyroidism) or more slowly (hypothyroidism) than it should. It is the latter condition, hypothyroidism, that is most common, making up perhaps 80 percent of thyroid disease cases. In hypothyroidism, your thyroid gland is not active enough, leading to:

- Weight gain
- Fatigue
- Sensitivity to cold
- Muscle weakness
- Pale, dry skin
- Sluggishness
- Constipation
- Depression
- Swelling of your joints
- A puffy face and hoarse voice
- Brittle fingernails and hair

The most common cause of hypothyroidism is an autoimmune disease known as Hashimoto thyroiditis, which may be caused by a virus, bacteria, genetics, or a combination of environmental factors. Thyroid surgery, radiation therapy for cancer and certain medications

(such as lithium) can also lead to hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism is generally diagnosed using a blood test that measures your levels of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH). Conventionally, hypothyroidism is treated by taking a synthetic or natural thyroid hormone daily.

How Do Foods Impact My Thyroid?
Naturally occurring substances known as goitrogens exist in certain foods and are known to interfere with thyroid function. Foods that contain goitrogens include:

- Cruciferous veggies (broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, turnips, etc.)
- Soybeans and soy extracts
- Millet
- Peaches
- Strawberries
- Radishes
- Spinach
- Peanuts

If you're healthy, there's no need to limit goitrogen-containing foods, however if you have hypothyroidism some health care practitioners recommend against excessive consumption of these foods. That said, because research studies showing a link between goitrogenic foods and thyroid hormone deficiency have yet to be conducted, you probably don't need to eliminate these foods entirely, just eat them in reasonable quantities. Generally speaking, the food that could be most problematic would be soy. This is because soy exists in many forms in most processed foods. So if you eat a lot of processed foods, you could be inadvertently consuming a lot of soy. Therefore, people with hypothyroidism may want to limit their intake of processed foods. Cooking is also known to help inactivate goitrogenic compounds in foods, so if you enjoy cruciferous veggies but are concerned about your thyroid, eating them cooked may be preferable. As for foods that may HELP your thyroid function, those rich in selenium, iodine and animal-based omega-3 fats may all be beneficial. A small amount of broccoli or other cruciferous veggie is unlikely to cause much thyroid trouble, especially if it's cooked. However, excess quantities could be problematic.