Supporting Thyroid Function

The thyroid gland is a small butterfly-shaped gland in the neck, just in front of the windpipe. One of its main functions is to produce hormones that help control growth, cell repair and metabolism — the process whereby your body converts food into energy. A number of nutrients play a key role in maintaining thyroid health, so you are able support your thyroid with the dietary choices you make.

Several different disorders can arise when your thyroid produces too much hormone (hyperthyroidism) or not enough (hypothyroidism).

There are four common disorders of the thyroid; Hashimoto's thyroiditis (underactive thyroid, autoimmune), Graves' disease (over-active thyroid, autoimmune), goitre (swollen thyroid gland), and thyroid nodules.

Foods alone won't reverse thyroid disorders, but a combination of the right nutrients and medication can help restore impaired thyroid function and minimise your symptoms.

Tyrosine: *Needed for thyroid hormone production and conversion*	Avocado, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, cashew nuts, Brazil nuts bananas, tuna, chicken, prawns, salmon, herring, eggs, oats.
Iodine: *Needed to make thyroid hormones*	Sea vegetables — kombu, wakame, arame, dulse, hijiki, nori, sea fish, shellfish, sardines.
Zinc: *Helps the body activate thyroid hormones*	Seafood, shrimps, shellfish, oysters, fish, ginger, lean red meat (esp. lamb), nuts (esp. pecans, Brazils), peas, egg yolk, whole wheat, rye, oats, seeds (esp. pumpkin), rice, lentils, pulses, molasses.
Iron: *Needed for thyroid hormone production and conversion*	Seeds (esp. pumpkin and sesame), parsley, nuts (esp. almonds, cashews, Brazils, walnuts, pecans), prunes, raisins, dates, cooked dried beans, shellfish, fish (esp. sardines), lean red meat, cocoa, leafy green vegetables.

Selenium: *Helps activates thyroid hormones so they can be used by the body*	Tuna, oysters, molasses, eggs, mushrooms, cottage cheese, herrings, courgettes, tomatoes, cod, chicken, nuts (esp. Brazils), onions, garlic.
Copper: *Closely linked to optimal thyroid hormone levels*	Shellfish, lamb, pecans, sesame, hazelnuts, pistachios, Brazils, sunflower seeds, avocado, sweet potatoes, green leafy vegetables, plums, yeast, mushrooms, cocoa.
Magnesium: *Involved in thyroid hormone conversion*	Buckwheat, nuts (esp. Brazils, pecans, hazelnuts, cashews, pistachios) cooked beans, lentils, garlic, raisins, apricots, dried figs, bananas, peas, potato skin, dark green leafy vegetables, avocado, poultry, fish, seafood, cocoa.
Manganese: *Facilitates in thyroid hormone production*	Watercress, pineapple, okra, endive, blackberries, raspberries, lettuce, grapes, lima beans, strawberries, oats, root vegetables (esp. beetroot), celery, eggs, nuts, wholemeal bread, fish, meats.

Use natural unrefined salt

Unrefined salts such as Himalayan or Celtic sea salt are rich in iodine and support the transport of iodine into the thyroid gland.

Avoid goitrogens

Goitrogens are naturally-occurring substances which can interfere with the thyroid's iodine uptake. Food sources include:

Unfermented soya products — soya milk, tofu, soya mince etc.
Cassava
Maize
Millet
Peanuts
Almonds
Walnuts
Pine nuts
Broccoli
Brussels sprouts
Cabbage
Cauliflower
Horseradish
Kale
Mustard
Rape
Swede
Turnip

Cooking goitrogens reduces the effect, so the foods listed above are fine to eat cooked but avoid eating large amounts of them raw.

Avoid fluoride

The thyroid needs a good supply of iodine to function. Fluoride competes with iodine reducing the amount available to make thyroid hormones. Fluoride is found in many toothpastes and mouthwashes, so it is a good idea to swap your usual brands for natural dental care products made without fluoride.

Eco packaging

Reduce consumption of food packaged in plastic, cans and tetrapacks.
Plastic bottles and the lining inside cans and tetrapacks contain a compound called bisphenol-A which has been shown to interfere with thyroid function.

Natural sunscreen

Many commercial sunscreens contain chemicals (such as 4-methyl-benzylidene camphor [4-MBC]) which can interfere with thyroid function. Instead opt for a natural sunscreen e.g., Green People Sun Cream.

Avoid smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke

Tobacco is known to decrease secretion of thyroid hormone and block its action, making the symptoms of hypothyroidism worse.

Limit or avoid alcohol

Alcohol changes thyroid function and reduces the levels of thyroid hormone.