

Letter from the Industrial Physician



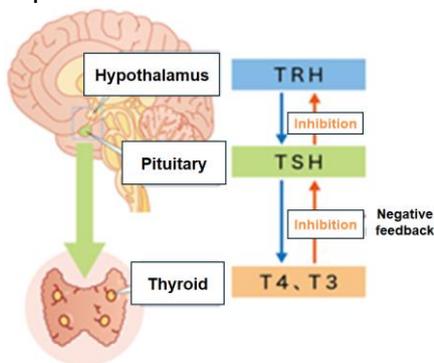
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The Story of Hypothyroidism; Serious illness? Minor illness?

Last month, Ayumi Ishida, a singer and actress, passed away due to hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism is a disease in which the lack of thyroid hormone secretion causes a decrease in overall body metabolism. The main symptoms include tiredness, coldness, weight gain, constipation, dry skin, swelling, and a hoarse voice. These symptoms are easily confused with aging or overwork and are often overlooked. They may also be detected by symptoms such as a recent loss of motivation.

In Japan, thyroid disorders are highly prevalent, and it is estimated that one in ten people in Japan has thyroid disease, including those with minor symptoms that do not require treatment. The main cause of hypothyroidism is chronic thyroiditis (Hashimoto's disease), an autoimmune disease, which is more common in women. The diagnosis is made by blood tests, which show low levels of thyroid hormones (T3 and T4) and elevated levels of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), as shown in the figure below. The treatment is to supplement the deficient hormone by taking thyroid hormone preparations.



Quoted from the Chugai website

With appropriate treatment, many patients can lead a normal life. The mortality rate is a concern, but if the disease is properly diagnosed and treated, the direct mortality rate is considered low. However, severe untreated or inadequately treated cases can lead to serious complications. One such complication is myxoedema coma, the most severe form of hypothyroidism.

According to one report, myxoedema coma occurs in about 0.1% of hypothyroid patients. The in-hospital mortality rate for myxoedema coma in Japan is reported to be about 29.5%.

Hypothyroidism is a manageable disease with proper diagnosis and treatment. However, it is often overlooked because of the nonspecific nature of its symptoms. It is important to consider medical testing, especially in middle-aged and older women, if symptoms such as tiredness, coldness, and weight gain persist.

In addition, patients with hypothyroidism tend to have a slightly higher overall mortality rate than the general population, making it a common but not easy to underestimate disease.

The exact opposite of hypothyroidism is hyperthyroidism, the most famous of which is Graves' disease. This disease is characterized by an excessively high metabolic rate, resulting in symptoms such as excessive motivation, heart palpitations, excessive sweating, weight loss, and a peculiar facial appearance. It is known to have affected famous athletes.