
Understanding Your Thyroid Tests

For many years doctors have relied on a single test called “TSH” (thyroid-stimulating hormone) to help diagnose and treat patients with a thyroid disorder. Advances in thyroid testing are emerging and could help doctors optimize your thyroid function.



There is now more scientific evidence and awareness that the TSH test alone may not be as accurate as a panel of thyroid function tests. There is also an increasing appreciation that the range of TSH test results that was once considered normal for the population as a whole may not be optimal for you.

For these reasons, it may surprise you that although one of your doctors has told you, “Your TSH is normal, so you do not have a thyroid problem,” your functional medicine practitioner may tell you, “Even though your TSH is in the normal range, based on your history and other symptoms, it would be helpful to do further testing to see if you have a subtle form of thyroid dysfunction that is contributing to you not feeling well.”

A TSH test only tells us how much thyroid hormone the body is trying to produce, not how much it is actually producing. The “additional” tests that your functional medicine practitioner may order will tell us how much active thyroid hormone your body actually produces.

Think of the normal TSH range in this way: Although the normal shoe size for most people is between 6 and 10, if your foot is size 6, you will not feel well or function well in a size 8 shoe, even though both sizes are “normal.” In the same way, if your TSH result is 3.5 (normal), you may not feel as well or function as well unless your TSH result is closer to 1.5 (optimal).

REFERENCES

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