

News Release
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Research Shows Hypothyroidism Patients Who Choose Alternative Therapies Cite Effectiveness, Improved Symptoms

LITTLE ROCK — Three out of four people with an underactive thyroid using an alternative “natural” treatment not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration report that they do so because it is more effective than the standard therapy, according to research from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) and the Mayo Clinic.

Freddy J.K. Toloza, M.D. and Spyridoula Maraka, M.D., presented their findings in a supplemental issue of the *Journal of the Endocrine Society*.

“Among people with hypothyroidism, some may prefer alternative treatments over standard thyroid hormone replacement therapies for many reasons, including better perceived effectiveness, improvement in symptoms such as fatigue and weight gain, and improvement in overall wellbeing,” Toloza said.

Toloza is a postdoctoral researcher and Maraka is an assistant professor, both in the Division of Endocrinology and Metabolism in the Department of Internal Medicine, UAMS College of Medicine. Maraka is also a staff physician at the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System. Both are also research collaborators at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

They conducted this study using comments from online patient forums, where they found that people who chose desiccated thyroid extract (DTE) said this option was more effective than other thyroid hormone medications. Comments on DTE use most frequently mentioned an improvement in symptoms and overall well-being as benefits.

This alternative treatment — also known as nature thyroid, thyroid USP or Armour thyroid — is made from dehydrated pig thyroid glands. An estimated 10%-25% of people with hypothyroidism — an underactive thyroid — use this treatment.

They noted that nearly half (45%) of people who commented about using DTE reported that a health care provider initially drove their interest in trying DTE, even though it is not an approved treatment.

Hypothyroidism affects 0.5%-2% of the U.S. population. Levothyroxine (LT4), a synthetic thyroid hormone, is the recommended treatment for patients with hypothyroidism.

These researchers analyzed the online forums to better understand patient preferences and attitudes. They used the 10 most popular patient forums and selected 673 posts for analysis.

Patients described many reasons for switching from a previous thyroid treatment to DTE, including lack of improvement in symptoms (58%) and the development of side effects (22%). Among a majority of patients, DTE was described as moderately-to-majorly effective overall (81%) and more effective than other thyroid hormone medications (77%). The most frequently described benefits associated with DTE use were an improvement in symptoms such as fatigue and weight gain (56%), as well as a change in overall well-being (34%). One-fifth of people also described side effects related to the use of DTE.

“The findings underscore the need for clinicians to individualize therapy approaches for hypothyroidism,” Toloza said.

Endocrinologists treat and study illnesses of the endocrine system like diabetes, obesity, infertility, bone health, and hormone-related cancers. The Endocrine Society is the world’s oldest and largest organization of scientists devoted to hormone research and physicians who care for people with hormone-related conditions.

Also participating in the project was Juan P. Brito, M.D., an associate professor of medicine at Mayo Clinic and other members of the Knowledge and Evaluation Research Unit (KER unit) at the Mayo Clinic.

UAMS is the state’s only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS’ clinical enterprise including its hospital, regional clinics and clinics it operates or staffs in cooperation with other providers. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. *U.S. News & World Report* named UAMS Medical Center the state’s Best Hospital; ranked its ear, nose and throat program among the top 50 nationwide; and named six areas as high performing — cancer, colon cancer surgery, heart failure, hip replacement, knee replacement and lung cancer surgery. UAMS has 2,727 students, 870 medical residents and five dental residents. It is the state’s largest public employer with more than 10,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children’s Hospital, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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