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A MESSAGE FROM MARY SHOMON

Dear Readers,

Thyroid problems affect an estimated 27 million Americans, the vast majority of them women. Few women, however, are aware of the critical relationship between the thyroid gland - our master gland of metabolism - and nearly every aspect of child-bearing. As a woman, your thyroid can affect your fertility, your ability to become pregnant and maintain a healthy pregnancy, postpartum health, successful breastfeeding, and even the health of your baby.

For example. . .

**Undiagnosed, thyroid problems can cause infertility or recurrent miscarriage, making it difficult or impossible for you to get or stay pregnant.** You may undergo expensive and invasive procedures attempting to overcome infertility and conceive a baby - yet thyroid testing has not been done. An undiagnosed thyroid problem may be the real reason you can't get pregnant - and no one is even looking for it!

**Thyroid problems can complicate your pregnancy.** Undiagnosed and untreated thyroid problems, and even diagnosed but improperly treated thyroid conditions, can worsen your pregnancy symptoms such as fatigue, hair loss, depression, and morning sickness. Undiagnosed, untreated or insufficiently treated thyroid conditions can also endanger your pregnancy, increasing the risk of miscarriage, intrauterine growth retardation, pre-term labor, stillbirth, and cognitive problems/mental retardation in your child.

**Thyroid problems can appear after delivery.** The post-partum period is a common time when thyroid problems appear. If you have symptoms such as fatigue, depression, weight gain/loss, and hair loss, you may think they are normal for a new mother, or you may even be misdiagnosed as having post-partum depression. Despite the fact that few women are properly diagnosed and tested, these common symptoms frequently point to a post-partum thyroid problem.

**Thyroid problems can cause difficulties with breastfeeding.** While the benefits of breastfeeding are well-known, and more women are trying this natural way to feed their babies, the fact that thyroid problems can make breastfeeding more difficult is rarely discussed. Undiagnosed or undertreated thyroid problems are also a key factor behind low milk supply.

While this can sound daunting, don't be discouraged! It's true that thyroid disease can present some challenges if you are considering getting pregnant, or are already pregnant. However, as you'll find out by reading this guide, if you're a woman struggling to conceive a baby, getting your thyroid problem diagnosed and properly treated may finally be the solution to problems you've had having a baby. And, if you're a woman with a thyroid condition, it is entirely possible to have
a perfectly healthy pregnancy and baby, as long as you are prepared with the right information, and receive proper treatment along the way.

By reading my *Thyroid Guide to Fertility, Pregnancy & Breastfeeding Success*, asking questions of your doctor, and learning all you can about your disease, you are taking the first -- and most important -- step: educating yourself and becoming a patient advocate, not only for yourself but for your baby!

In my own case, I was diagnosed with Hashimoto's thyroiditis and hypothyroidism in 1995. In 1997, at age 35, my husband and I started our efforts to conceive a child, but only after I had a thorough understanding of my fertility cycles, and had my thyroid condition under control and carefully monitored. I'm happy to report that with the extra planning, preparation and knowledge, our daughter was conceived quickly, and after an uneventful pregnancy, was born a happy and healthy 8 1/2 pounds in late 1997. So don't let anyone tell you that a thyroid problem means you can't have a baby, because happily, my daughter is evidence to the contrary!

Live well,

Mary

P.S. Don't miss the Fall 2005 News Update featuring some of the latest research that is included in this guide!
SECTION 1: OVERVIEW OF THYROID CONDITIONS

This section offers a brief review of the thyroid, what it does, and the key conditions that can affect it. Note that the diagnosis and treatment overview provided here apply generally, however, special guidelines apply in pregnancy. These are discussed in Sections 2 and 3 of the guide.

ABOUT YOUR THYROID

Your thyroid is a small bowtie or butterfly-shaped gland, located in your neck around the windpipe, behind and below your Adam's Apple area. The thyroid produces several hormones, of which two are particularly important: triiodothyronine (T3) and thyroxine (T4). These hormones help oxygen get into your cells, and are essential to your body's ability to produce energy. This role in delivering oxygen and energy makes your thyroid the master gland of metabolism.

When your thyroid is functioning properly, all of the hormone produced by your thyroid, approximately 80% will be T4 and 20% T3.

Of the two, T3 is the more biologically active hormone -- the one that actually has an effect on you at the cellular level. As I mentioned before, the thyroid produces some T3, but the rest of the T3 needed by the body is actually formed when the body converts T4 to T3. This "T4 to T3 conversion" can take place in the thyroid, as well as in other organs and tissues.

So how does the thyroid know how much T4 and T3 to release? The release of hormones from the thyroid is part of a huge feedback process. The hypothalamus, a part of the brain, releases something called Thyrotropin-Releasing Hormone (TRH). The release of TRH tells your pituitary gland to release Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH). This TSH, circulating in your bloodstream, is the messenger that tells your thyroid to make the thyroid hormones - the T4 and T3 -- and release them into your bloodstream. When there is enough thyroid hormone circulating in your bloodstream, the pituitary slows down the production of TSH, which signals to the thyroid to slow down hormone production. It's a smoothly functioning system when it works properly. When something interferes with the system, however, the feedback process gets glitchy, and thyroid problems can develop.