

Mayo Clinic News Network

Title: Mayo Clinic Minute: Levothyroxine overload?

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Intro: The most commonly prescribed drug in the U.S. may also be one of the most overprescribed for older individuals. Up to 15 percent of the senior population receives [levothyroxine](#), a medication used to treat low [thyroid](#) hormone levels. However, a study published this spring in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) reported that patients with slightly low, or subclinical, thyroid hormone levels received no benefit from the drug.

[Mayo Clinic](#) endocrinologist [Dr. Juan Brito, M.B.B.S.](#), says, while some people genuinely need the hormone replacement to regulate metabolism and ward off health risks, most people taking it do not. Dr. Brito says each prescription should be accompanied by thorough follow-up care. "What is important is to engage the patient and the doctor and make sure they have a reason to [take] it and a plan – what to do if symptoms don't get better and what to do if the symptoms do get better." Dennis Douda reports.

Video

Audio

Total running time [0:59]	///VIDEO
Dennis Douda speaking	It's the most prescribed medication in the U.S., with more than 120,000,000 levothyroxine prescriptions written each year. The drug's purpose is to raise low thyroid hormone levels for a condition called hypothyroidism.
Dr. Juan Brito speaking	"But the majority of these patients will be surprised that, actually, they don't need it."
Dennis Douda speaking	Mayo Clinic endocrinologist Dr. Juan Brito says more frequent testing is partially to blame, as well as hypothyroidism's very common, somewhat vague, symptoms.
TITLE: Juan Brito, M.B.B.S. Endocrinology Mayo Clinic	"Weight loss, hair loss, dry skin, fatigue, low energy – those are symptoms of many other conditions. Actually, they are symptoms of just life sometimes."
Dennis Douda speaking	Dr. Brito says that's why many patients' symptoms don't improve with a daily pill. He urges physicians to have valid reasons for prescribing levothyroxine and to follow up in three months' time to see if the patient benefitted.
Dr. Juan Brito speaking	"And that is the key – is to reassess. The majority of the patients get treated and never have a chance to withdraw the medicine, and they just get treated for the rest of their lives."
Dennis Douda speaking	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I'm Dennis Douda.