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Cutaneous Manifestations of Thyroid Disorders: An Underrecognized Diagnostic Clue for Dermatologists

Luiz Fernando Ribeiro*

Department of Dermatology, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil

***Corresponding author:** Luiz Fernando Ribeiro, Department of Dermatology, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Editorial

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Abstract

Thyroid disorders are among the most common endocrine diseases and frequently manifest with characteristic changes in the skin, hair, and nails. Because thyroid hormones play a critical role in regulating epidermal turnover, dermal integrity, hair follicle function, and sebaceous gland activity, both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism can produce distinct cutaneous findings. Patients with hypothyroidism often present with dry, coarse skin, diffuse alopecia, brittle nails, and facial puffiness, whereas hyperthyroidism is commonly associated with warm, moist skin, excessive sweating, fine hair, and onycholysis. Graves' disease may also present with pretibial myxedema, a distinctive dermatological manifestation that can aid diagnosis. Autoimmune thyroid disorders have also been associated with several immune-mediated skin diseases, including chronic urticaria, vitiligo, and alopecia areata, further emphasizing the close relationship between thyroid dysfunction and dermatological health. These clinical features may precede systemic symptoms, providing dermatologists with an opportunity for early recognition and timely referral for endocrine evaluation. Increased awareness of thyroid-related skin manifestations and close collaboration between dermatologists and endocrinologists can facilitate prompt diagnosis, appropriate management, and improved patient outcomes. This editorial highlights the importance of recognizing cutaneous manifestations as valuable diagnostic clues in thyroid disorders.

Keywords: Thyroid disorders; Cutaneous manifestations; Dermatology; Hypothyroidism; Hyperthyroidism; Chronic urticaria; Vitiligo; Alopecia areata; Pretibial myxedema

Introduction

The thyroid gland plays a fundamental role in regulating metabolism, growth, and the normal functioning of multiple organ systems through the secretion of the hormones triiodothyronine (T3) and thyroxine (T4). In addition to their systemic effects, these hormones are essential for maintaining the health and physiological functions of the skin, hair, and nails. Thyroid hormone receptors are expressed in keratinocytes, fibroblasts, sebaceous glands, and hair follicles, highlighting the close relationship between thyroid function and cutaneous homeostasis. Consequently, disturbances in thyroid hormone levels can lead to a wide range of dermatological manifestations that often reflect the underlying endocrine disorder.

Both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism are associated with characteristic changes in the skin, hair, and nails. Patients with hypothyroidism commonly present with dry, coarse skin, diffuse hair loss, brittle nails, and

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facial puffiness, whereas hyperthyroidism is frequently characterized by warm, moist skin, excessive sweating, fine hair, and nail abnormalities such as onycholysis. In autoimmune thyroid diseases, particularly Graves' disease, pretibial myxedema represents a distinctive cutaneous finding that can provide an important diagnostic clue.

In many patients, these dermatological manifestations may appear before the development of classic systemic symptoms of thyroid dysfunction. As a result, dermatologists are often among the first healthcare professionals to encounter these clinical signs during routine evaluation. Early recognition of thyroid-related skin changes can prompt timely laboratory investigations, facilitate appropriate referral to endocrinologists, and enable early treatment, thereby reducing disease-related complications and improving patient outcomes.

In addition to the classical skin, hair, and nail changes observed in thyroid dysfunction, autoimmune thyroid diseases are increasingly recognized to coexist with several dermatological disorders, including chronic urticaria, vitiligo, and alopecia areata. These associations highlight the shared autoimmune mechanisms that contribute to both endocrine and cutaneous diseases. Consequently, dermatologists play an important role not only in recognizing the direct cutaneous manifestations of thyroid dysfunction but also in identifying associated autoimmune skin disorders that may warrant thyroid evaluation. This editorial discusses the dermatological manifestations of thyroid disorders and emphasizes the importance of early recognition, interdisciplinary collaboration, and comprehensive patient management.

Autoimmune Skin Disorders Associated with Thyroid Disease

Beyond the classical cutaneous manifestations of thyroid dysfunction, several autoimmune skin diseases have been reported to occur more frequently in patients with autoimmune thyroid disorders. Chronic urticaria has demonstrated a well-established association with autoimmune thyroid disease, particularly Hashimoto's thyroiditis, and affected patients may benefit from thyroid function testing and thyroid autoantibody screening. Likewise, vitiligo frequently coexists with autoimmune thyroid disease because both conditions share common genetic and immunological mechanisms involving autoimmune destruction of target tissues. Alopecia areata has also been associated with thyroid autoimmunity, and patients presenting with unexplained or recurrent hair loss should be evaluated for underlying thyroid dysfunction when clinically appropriate. Pretibial myxedema remains the hallmark dermatological manifestation of Graves' disease and serves as a highly specific clinical indicator of autoimmune hyperthyroidism. Recognition of these associated skin disorders enables dermatologists to identify occult thyroid disease, facilitate timely referral for endocrine assessment, and promote comprehensive patient care.

Future Perspective

Future efforts should focus on strengthening collaboration between dermatologists and endocrinologists to improve the early recognition and comprehensive management of thyroid-related skin disorders. Increasing awareness of the diverse cutaneous manifestations and associated autoimmune skin diseases among healthcare professionals may facilitate earlier diagnosis and timely intervention. Incorporating routine dermatological assessment into the evaluation of patients with suspected thyroid dysfunction could improve diagnostic accuracy and patient outcomes. Furthermore, continued research is needed to elucidate the molecular pathways linking thyroid hormones, immune dysregulation, and skin biology. Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and digital dermatology, also hold promise for enhancing the early detection, classification, and monitoring of thyroid-associated cutaneous manifestations in clinical practice.

Conclusion

Cutaneous manifestations of thyroid disorders are more than cosmetic changes; they often serve as important clinical indicators of underlying endocrine dysfunction. Careful recognition of skin, hair, and nail abnormalities can facilitate the early identification of hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism, and autoimmune thyroid diseases, even before systemic symptoms become apparent. Prompt diagnosis and timely initiation of appropriate therapy can not only improve dermatological manifestations but also prevent disease progression and associated complications. Therefore, dermatologists should maintain a high index of suspicion when evaluating unexplained cutaneous findings and consider thyroid dysfunction in the differential diagnosis. Strengthening collaboration between dermatologists and endocrinologists is essential for comprehensive patient care, enabling accurate diagnosis, individualized treatment, and improved long-term clinical outcomes. Greater awareness of these dermatological clues will ultimately contribute to earlier intervention and better quality of life for affected patients.

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