Razmatranje autoimunosti kao uzroka bolesti počelo je kada i sama imunologija, 1901. godine. sa Erlihovim pojmom *Horror autotoxicus*. Tri godine kasnije opisano je hladno autoantitelo autohemolizin, zaslužno za paroksizmalnu hemoglobinuriju, ali bez da je oformljen ikakav trajan koncept autoimunosti kao uzročnika ove bolesti. Erlihova doktrina doduše nije pomogla u prihvatjanju koncepta autoimunosti, kao ni okrenutost imunologije u tom periodu prema spoljnim uzročnicima umesto unutrašnjim. Između 1915. i 1945. godine imunologija se okrenula drugim poljima istraživanja, iako su rađene studije vezane za autoimunost, a 1945. godine dolazi do ekspanzije istraživanja autoimunosti. Pojam je opšteprihvaćen tek oko 1965. godine (1).

*Autoimune bolesti* predstavljaju spektar bolesti uzrokovanih zapaljenjem, usled produkcije autoantitela i posledičnog citotoksičnog delovanja T limfocita. Podaci ukazuju na razlike u prevalenciji autoimunih bolesti između Evrope, Severne Amerike, Australije i Novog Zelanda (definisano kao zona 1) i Azije, Bliskog istoka, Kariba i Južne Amerike (zona 2) (2). U većini autoimunih bolesti žene čine >85% bolesnika. Samo u nekim autoimunim bolestima sa prezentacijom u detinjstvu, kao što je dijabetes melitus tip 1, rizik od obolevanja je podjednak za oba pola. Postoje tri pika za nastupanje autoimunih bolesti: između 8. i 10. godine (juvenilni reumatoidni artritis, DM tip 1), između 33. i 50. godine (mijastenija gravis, multipla skleroza, SLE, skleroderma, Grejvssova bolest) i između 52. i 63. godine (Hašimoto tireoiditis, adultni reumatoidni artritis) (3).

*Autoimune bolesti štitne žlezde* su najprevalentnije organ-specifične bolesti i za-hvataju 2–5% populacije (4), sa velikom varijabilnošću među polovima (5–15% žena, 1–5% muškaraca) (5). Najznačajnija dva entiteta u okviru autoimunih bolesti štitaste žlezde su Hašimoto tireoiditis i Grejvssova bolest. Ove bolesti su posledica gubitka imunološke toleranije sopstvenih antigena. Dolazi do čelijskog i humoralnog imunog odgovora protiv antigena štitne žlezde sa reaktivnom infiltracijom T i B limfocitima, proizvodnjom autoantitela i zatim razvijanja kliničkih manifestacija bolesti (6, 7). Ovo

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1 Medigroup Bulevar, Dom zdravlja
su bolesti multifaktorielne etiologije, sa kompleksnom interakcijom između faktora sredine i genetske predispozicije (8).

Genetika igra značajnu ulogu u patogenezi autoimunih bolesti štitaste žlezde. Neki od gena zaslužnih za ove autoimmune bolesti su zajednički za Hašimoto tireoiditis i Grejvsovou bolest, dok su ustanovljeni i geni koji su specifični za jednu od ove 2 bolesti (9). Asocijacija između HLA gena i ovih bolesti je opštepoznata. To objašnjava neke sličnosti u patološkom nalazu između Hašimoto tireoiditis i Grejvsove bolesti, jer je u obe bolesti prezentacija zavisna od izvesnih HLA-B i HLA-DR, što sugerise da su nasledni faktori rizika važni u patogenezi ovih bolesti (10, 11). Pored HLA gena, drugi geni zaslužni za imuni sistem su takođe odgovorni za razvoj kako svih autoimunih bolesti tako i autoimunih bolesti štitne žlezde, što govori u prilog genetske podložnosti autoimunim bolestima. Polimorfizam u određenim alelima CTLA-4 je povezan sa predispozicijom za Hašimoto tireoiditis i Grejvsovou bolest (12–16). U studiji sprovedenoj na 379 pacijenata u Velikoj Britaniji, 42% pacijenata u ispitivanoj grupi je imalo G alel CLA-4 gena, dok je u kontrolnoj grupi taj alel imalo 32% (16). Ova genetska abnormalnost je bila povezana sa stimulacijom proizvodnje tireoidnih antitela i kliničkom prezentacijom autoimunog tireoiditisa u interakciji sa drugim lokusima takođe zaslužnim za genetsku predispoziciju prema ovoj bolesti (6, 13, 16, 17). CD40 se nalazi jedino na folikularnim ćelijama štitne žlezde i na B limfocitima. Polimorfizam ovog gena je povezan sa 20–30% povećanjem translacije iRNA transkripta CD40 kod pacijenata sa autoimunim bolestima štitne žlezde (18). Polimorfizam PTPN22 gena, koji enkodira negativni regulator aktivacije T limfocita, je doveden u vezu kako sa autoimunim bolestima štitne žlezde tako i sa autoimunim bolestima uopšte (9). Abnormalnosti u FOXP3 genu, koji je zaslužan za differencijaciju T limfocita u Treg ćelije, su dovedene u vezu sa juvenilnom formom Grejvsove bolesti (19). Promene u CD25 genu su takođe povezane sa Grejvosovom bolešću (20).

Iako je veza između genetske podložnosti i faktora iz sredine jasna, mehanizam kojim genetska varijabilnost interreaguje sa sredinskim faktorima u autoimunim bolestima i dalje nije u potpunosti jasna. Skorašnji podaci ukazuju na ulogu epigenetskih mehanizama. Epigenetska modulacija genske ekspresije se može manifestovati promenama u metilaciji DNK, modifikaciji histona (acetilacija, deacetilacija, metilacija), kao i RNK interferencija putem mikroRNK molekula. U skorije vreme, pokazano je da IFN-α indukuje alteraciju u genu za tireoglobulin kroz epigenetske promene u histonima (21). S obzirom na to da se IFN-α sekretuje lokalno tokom virusnih infekcija, to bi moglo da objasni mehanizam kojim bi infekcije mogle da budu okidač za razvijanje autoimunih bolesti štitne žlezde (22). Još jedan epigenetski fenomen opisan u patogenezi autoimunih bolesti štitne žlezde je inaktivacija X hromozoma. Mera inaktivacije X hromozoma je značajan faktor u povećanoj sklonosti žena ka ovim autoimunim bolestima, sudeći po studiji Yin et al. (23).
Brojni faktori sredine su povezani sa pojavom autoimunih bolesti štitne žležde, kao što su niska telesna masa na rođenju, višak joda, deficit selenijuma, stres, pušenje, allergije, izlaganje zračenju, lekovi, virusne ili bakterijske infekcije, kao i fetačni mikrohimerizam (24). Pušenje spada među značajnije faktore okoline vezane za ovu bolest, ako ne i najznačajniji faktor (25). Dim cigareta sadrži cijanid, koji se metaboliše do tiocijanata, koji mogu da remete koncentracije joda u štitnoj žlezdi (26).

Postoje dokaze koji sugerišu da je umešanost infekcija u patogenezi ovih bolesti vrlo značajna. Međutim, čak i nepatogeni mikroorganizmi, normalni stanovnici ljudske mikroflore, indukuju proinflamatorni ili regulatorni imuni odgovor u domaćinu (27). Postoje podaci da su B. Burgdorferi i Y. Enterocolitica česti okidači tireoidne autoimunosti. Pretpostavlja se da je molekularna mimikrija način na koji ova dva mikroorganizma izazivaju autoimuni odgovor (28, 29). Još neki mikroorganizmi za koje se pretpostavlja da igraju ulogu okidača u autoimunim bolestima štitne žlezde su H. Pylori, Koksaki virus, hepatitis C virus i retrovirusi (29).

Iako je jod neophodan za funkcionisanje štitne žlezde, takođe je jedan od najvažnijih izazivača tireoidne disfunkcije. Blagi deficit joda je povezan sa smanjenom prevalencijom Hašimoto tireoiditisa, dok je blagi suficit ovog elementa povezan sa većom prevalencijom ove autoimune bolesti. Potencijalni mehanizmi kojima bi jod mogao da indukuje tireoidnu autoimunost uključuju direktnu stimulaciju imunog odgovora u štitnoj žlezdi, povećanu imunogenost visokojodiranog tireoglobulina i direktan toksični efekat joda na tireocite putem generacije slobodnih radikala (30–32). Kahaly et al. su pratili grupu pacijenata sa endemskom strumom koja je primala jod 6 meseci i grupu sa istim stanjem koja je primala T4. Visok titar tireoidnih antitela je pronađen u 16% pacijenata koji su bili na tretmanu jodom. Pošto su prestali da uzimaju jod nivoi antitela su se značajno smanjila i posle 4 godine su bili normalni kod 4 od 6 pacijenata (30).

Najčešća manifestacija zračenja na štitnoj žlezdi je hipofunkcija, kako usled direktnih destrukcija žlezde tako i usled stimulacije tireoidnih antitela (29). Autoimune bolesti štitne žlezde su se javljale i kod terapijske primene zračenja (33), kao i kod izlaganja zračenju u životnoj sredini (34). U studiji sprovedenoj na 160 ljudi koji su na radnom mestu bili izloženi radijaciji, 10% njih je ispunjavalo kriterijume za dijagnostiku autoimunog tireoiditisa, dok je u kontrolnoj grupi te kriterijume ispunjavalo samo 3,4%. Većem riziku su bili izloženi ispitanici koji su bili izloženi radijaciji više od 5 godina (35).

Mnogi polutanti prisutni u životnoj sredini su se pokazali kao izazivači pojave autoimunih bolesti štitne žlezde (36). Na primer, uočena je visoka prevalenca hipotiroidizma, sa povišenim vrednostima anti-TPO i anti-Tg, kod pojedinaca koji su bili izloženi polibromiranim bifenilima. Bisfenol A, često korišćen u proizvodnji plastike, mogao bi da se vezuje za TSHR kao kompetitivni antagonist T3 (31, 36, 37).
Nekoliko lekova igra ulogu u patogenezi autoimunih bolesti štitne žlezde. IFN-α, IL-2, litijum, amiodaron i visokoaktivna retroviralna terapija su agenci najčešće povezivani sa tireoidnom disfunkcijom (29, 31). Za većinu ovih lekova važi da su pacijenti sa najvećim rizikom za razvijanje autoimunog tireoiditisa, oni koji su pre primene ove terapije već imali povišene nivoe tireoidnih antitela (29, 31, 36). Neki lekovi, kao što je litijum, iako nisu direktni okidači autoimunosti, ubrzavaju autoimune procese interferirajući sintezu tireoidnih hormona. Testiranje funkcije štitne žlezde, kao i merenje titra anti-TPO bi trebalo razmotriti pre uvođenja ovih lekova u terapiju (24).

Mehanizmi kojim bi stres mogao da indukuje tireoidnu autoimunost su indukcija imunosupresije antigen nespecifičnim mehanizmima, verovatno usled efekata kortizola i CRH na imune ćelije, koje je praćeno imunom hiperreaktivnošću i posledičnom autoimunom boleću štitne žlezde. Veruje se da postpartalni tireoidizam ima sličan mehanizam nastanka. Međutim, za sada nema dokaza koji povezuju stres sa tireoidnom autoimunosću, verovatno jer su stresni događaj i samo oštećenje ove žlezde vremenski odvojeni (29, 31).

Fetalne ćelije su identifikovane u štitnim žezdama majki koje boluju od autoimunog tireoiditisa. Takve ćelije bi mogle da izazivaju bolest transplantata protiv primaoca (graft versus host disease) u štitnoj žlezdi i na taj način bi mogle da igraju značajnu ulogu u patogenezi Hašimoto tireoiditisa (38, 39). Ovakav mehanizam nastanka autoimunosti štitne žlezde je i dalje na nivou hipoteze.

Ove bolesti su uglavnom praćene prisustvom anti-TPO (tireoidna peroksidaza), anti-Tg (tireoglobulin), ili anti-TSH receptor antitela. Postoje i antitela protiv drugih ciljnih antigena (karboanhidraza 2, megalin, T3, T4, Na-I transporter, pendrin), međutim, retko se sreću u praksi (40). Tireoidna peroksidaza je slabo glikozilirani membranski vezan enzim zaslužan za oksidaciju joda i jodiranje tirozil rezidue tireoglobulinskog molekula (41). Anti-TPO antitela zdravih pojedinaca nisu blokirala TPO aktivnost (42), dok su anti-TPO antitela pacijenata sa autoimunim boleštima štitne žlezde uništavala tirocite i inhibisala enzimsku aktivnost TPO kompetitivnom inhibicijom (43). Anti-TPO antitela su ćešća nego anti-Tg antitela i stoga bolji indikator tireoidne autoimunosti (44). Anti-TPO antitela su i induktor oksidativnog stresa jer smanjuju antioksidativni potencijal (45). Ova antitela, iako deluju citotoksično na tirocite u Hašimoto tireoiditisu, nemaju ustanovljenu ulogu u Grejvsovoj bolesti (46).

Tireoglobulin je veliki (600kDa) glikoprotein koji se sastoji od dimera i u proseku 2–3 molekula T4 i 0,3 molekula T3. Ovaj molekul je heterogen što se tiče sadržaja, glikozilacije i građe. Produkcija antitela protiv Tg može biti indukovana masivnom destrukcijom štitne žlezde, mada visoki nivoi Tg u krvi ne indukuju nužno proizvodnju antitela. Od 40 epitopa na molekulu Tg koji su identifikovani, po nekim autorima 6, a po drugim 1–2, su imunogeni (47, 48). Zdravi pojedinci imaju nizak nivo anti-Tg antitela, uglavnom ispod praga potrebnog za laboratorijsku detekciju. U prisustvu povišenih
serumskih nivoa Tg usled destrukcije tkiva štitne žlezde, promenjena konformacija molekula tireoglobulina usled visokih nivoa I2 i povišenog TSH, abnormally raste i titar anti-Tg antitela (48). Davanje I2 ispitanicima indukovalo je produkciju anti-Tg antitela kod 8–20% ispitanika, udruženo sa intratireoidnim limfocitnim infiltratom kod nekih pacijenata (49).

**Hašimoto tireoiditis** je hronična inflamacija štitne žlezde prvi put opisana pre više od 100 godina, ali i dalje ne u potpunosti definisane etiopatogeneze (50). Smatra se najčešćom autoimunom bolešću u sredinom, najčešćim endokrinim poremećajem (53), kao i najčešćim uzrokom hipotiroidizma (54, 55).

Hašimoto tireoiditis je prvi put opisao dr Hakaru Hašimoto 1912. godine, pro- učavajući uzorke štitastih žlezda 4 sredovećne žene kojima je žlezda izvađena zbog kompresivnih simptoma. Ova bolest je smatrana retkom do pedesetih godina prošlog veka, a sada je najfrekventnija autoimmuna bolešća, sa incidencom od 1 na 1.000 osoba godišnje, i prevalencom od 8 na 1.000 ako se kao izvor uzimaju revizije naučnih članaka iz oblasti endokrinologije (50), a 46 na 1.000 ako se gledaju samo biohemisjski potvrđen tireoiditis i tireoidna antitela (56). Ova autoimmuna bolešća je i do 8 puta češća kod žena nego kod muškaraca, takođe bela i žuta rasa češće obolevaju od crne (50).

Povećan unos joda ishranom su u 2 kineske studije doveli u korelaciju sa povećanim javljanjem Hašimoto tireoiditisa u populaciji (57, 58). U Danskoj su nakon uvođenja obaveznog programa jodiranja soli uvideli povećanje prevalence povišenih anti-TPO antitela, kao i Hašimoto tireoiditisa (59). Etiološki se ova bolešća može podeliti na primarnu i sekundarnu formu.

U primarne tireoiditise spadaju svi slučajevi bez Jasne etiologije. Kliničko-pa-tološki gledano, primarni Hašimoto tireoiditis obuhvata 6 entiteta: klasičnu formu (60), fibroznu formu, IgG4 varijantu (61), juvenilnu formu (62), Hašitoksikozu i bezbolni (tihi) tireoiditis (javlja se kao izolovani i postpartalni) (63). Klinički, najčešća manifestacija je uvećanje štitastih žlezda (gušavost), koja ide sa ili bez propratnog hipotiroidizma. Najčešći patološki nalaz je značajna limfocitna infiltracija štitastih žlezda. Primarni Hašimoto tireoiditis se može manifestovati kao izolovana bolešća, ali se često može i javiti zajedno sa raznim drugim autoimunim bolestima (dijabetes tip 1, Sjogrenov sindrom), ili bolestima štitne žlezde. Među bolestima štitne žlezde značajno je spomenuti asocijaciju između primarnog Hašimoto tireoiditisa i papilarnog karcinoma štitne žlezde, koja je između 0,5 i 30%, u zavisnosti od izvora (60, 64).

Sekundarni tireoiditisi su forme ove bolesti sa ustanovljenim etiološkim agen-som. Najčešće su jatrogeni poreklom, kao posledica terapije imunomodulatornim lekovima (npr. primena interferona-α u terapiji hepatitisa C) (65). Tokom prethodnih 10 godina, razviće antikancerske imunoterapije dovelo je do pojavu mnoštva imu-nskih posredovanih bolesti, uključujući i tireoiditis, što se vidi na primeru primene monoklonalnih antitela koja blokiraju CTLA-4 (66), kao i na primeru vakcina protiv malignih bolesti (67).
Hašimoto tireoiditis je prototip organ-specifične autoimmune bolesti. Često pacijenti sa ovom bolešću ili imaju i druge autoimmune bolesti, ili imaju nekog u porodici sa drugim bolestima ove vrste (68), što ukazuje na genetsko poreklo ovih bolesti. Hašimoto tireoiditis (69) i sistemski lupus (70) su prve dve autoimmune bolesti za koje je dokazana genetska komponenta ranih sedamdesetih godina prošlog veka, u genima za MHC II klasu proteina. Međutim, u poslednje 4 decenije samo još par gena povezanih sa sklošošću ka tireoiditisu je pronađeno, mada nije ustanovljen mehanizam kojim utiču na pojavu ove bolesti (71).

Kod Hašimoto tireoiditisa zahvaćeni su kako tireociti tako i intersticijum koji okružuje folikule. Klasična forma ove bolesti se uglavnom prezentuje uvećanom, sivkastom štitnom žlezdom, sa karakterističnom intersticionalnom infiltracijom pretežno limfocitima sa nešto plazmocita i makrofaga (50). Limfociti se unutar žlezde organizuju u limfne folikule (tercijarne, ektopične), sa svim strukturnim karakteristikama pravog limfnog folikula. Takođe dolazi do fibroze intersticijuma. Tireociti su u nekim delovima žlezde afrofreni, a u drugim uvećani, sa hiperhromatizovanim jedrom i citoplazmom punom mitohondrija (72). Fibrozi tip tireoiditisa je okarakterisan uvećanom, tvrdom i lobuliranom štitnom žlezdom. Fibroza kod ove bolesti ne probija kapsulu, za razliku od Riedelovog tireoiditisa kod kog dolazi do adhezija žlezde za okolne strukture. I u ovom tipu dolazi do hronične inflamacije limfocitima, takođe organizovanim u folikule. U kasnoj fazi bolesti, kao i kod starijih pacijenata fibroza varijanta se manifestuje kao idiopatski miksedem, gde se tkivo štitne žlezde svede na mali fibrozni pupoljak (50).

IgG4 varijanta je prvi put opisana u Japanu 2009. godine. Patološki je definisana izraženom limfo-plazmocitnom infiltracijom, s tim što u ovoj varijanti bolesti u infiltratu je veliki broj IgG4- produkujućih plazma ćelija (>20 ćelija po vidnom polju). Intersticionalna fibroza nije izražena kao u prethodno opisane dve forme.

Ostale 3 forme (juvenilna, Hašitoksikoza, bezbolni tireoiditis) retko iziskuju tireoidektomiju, stoga nema mnogo patohistoloških uzoraka uzetih od pacijenata sa ovim tipovima bolesti. Imaju karakteristike slične ostalim oblicima, s tim što je fibroza blaža i nije toliko česta pojava limfnih folikula.

Dijagnoza Hašimoto tireoiditis se postavlja na osnovu kliničkih odlika, prisustva serumskih antitela protiv tireoidnih antigena (anti-TPO, anti-TG), kao i nalaza ultrazvuka štitne žlezde. Dodatne potrage koje se redovno izvode, ali doprinose u boljoj dijagnostici su scintigrafija štitne žlezde radi detekcije preuzimanja (uptake) radioaktivnog izotopa joda u štitnoj žlezdi, kao i citološko ispitivanje tireoidnog aspirata (50).

Manifestacije Hašimoto tireoiditis variraju u skladu sa prirodom same bolesti. U početku, pacijenti mogu imati hipertireoidne simptome, uzrokovane inicijalnom destrukcijom tireoidnih ćelija i posledičnim oslobađanjem tireoidnih hormona u krvoček. Kada se izmetabolišu oslobođeni hormoni, usled destrukcije tireocita, dolazi do
hipotireoidizma. Simptomi hipotireoidizma su podmukli, varijabilni i mogu zahvatiti gotovo svaki organ ili sistem organsa u telu.

Od kožnih manifestacija javlja se suva koža, posebno ekstrenzornih strana šaka i stopala, bleda koža usled nakupljanja dermalnih mukopolisaharida i posledičnog većeg zadržavanja vode, kao i miksedom u težim oblicima ove bolesti. Rast kose je usporen, i kosa je često krhka i suva. Alopecija je takođe relativno česta manifestacija. Periferni vaskularni otpor može pasti i do 60%, a minutni volumen može se smanjiti i do 50%. Može doći i do bradikardije. Umor, dispneja u naporu, kao i netolerancija napora se javljaju usled ograničene plućne i srčane rezerve, kao i usled mišićne slabosti. Rani simptomi mogu podrazumevati konstipaciju, umor, suvu kožu, kao i povećanje telesne mase. U kasnijim fazama bolesti dolazi do netolerancije hladnoće, smanjenog znojenja, perifernih neuropati, manjka energije, depresije, demencije, gubitka pamćenja, grčeva mišića, bola u zglobovima, gubitka kose, apneje, menopauze, kao i kompromisnih simptoma u predelju vruć zbog uvećanja štitaste žlezde i promuklosti. Pri pregledu treba obratiti pažnju na hladnu i suvu kožu, periorbitalne edeme, krhke nokte, bradikardiju, odloženu fazu relaxacije tetivnog refleksa, povećan krvni pritisak, usporen govor, ataksiju i makroglosiju (73).

Vitamin D je steroidni molekul koji se uglavnom proizvodi u koži, koji reguliše ekspresiju velikog broja gena (74). Postoje dve forme vitamina D, vitamin D3 (holecalciferol) i vitamin D2 (ergokalciferol). Holecalciferol se proizvodi u koži nakon izlaganja UVB zračenju, mada se može naći i u nekim namirnicama, kao što su neke masnije ribe, dok ergokalciferol proizvode biljke i gljive (75, 76). Vitamin D se iz digestivnog trakta inkorporira u hilomikrone, koji dospevaju u limfatički sistem, pa zatim u vensku krv. Ovaj vitamin, bilo da je iz kože ili iz ishrane, je biološki inertan dok ne prođe svoju prvu hidroksilaciju u jetri kada nastaje 25(OH)D. Vitamin D zahteva još jednu hidroksilaciju u bubrezima, kada nastaje biološki aktivna forma vitamina D 1,25(OH)2D (77). Ovaj aktivni oblik vitamina D stimulise intestinalnu apsorpciju kalcijuma. Bez vitamina D samo 10–15% kalcijuma i oko 60% fosfora je apsorbovano iz hrane (77, 78).

Receptor za vitamin D se nalazi u gotovo svim tkivima i ćelijama u telu. 1,25(OH)2D ima širok raspon efekata u organizmu, kao što je inhibicija ćelijske proliferacije, indukcija terminalne diferencijacije ćelija, inhibicija angiogeneze, stimulacija produkcije insulina i inhibicija produkcije renina (79–81). Biološki aktivna forma vitamina D je odgovorna za aktivaciju i supresiju između 200 i 500 gena, što čini ok 3% ljudskog genoma (82). Glavna uloga vitamina D je regulacija koštanog metabolizma i regulisanje homeostaze kalcijuma i fosfora. Skorašnja istraživanja su pokazala da bi vitamin D deficijencija, koja je široko rasprostranjena, mogla da ima i manifestacije mimo koštanog sistema, u vidu autoimunih bolesti, tumora, metaboličkih sindroma, itd (74, 83, 84). Niski serumski nivoi vitamina D su takođe povezani sa autoimunim bolestima štitne žlezde, kao što su Hašimoto tireoiditis i Grejvsova bolest (82, 85, 86).
Autoimune bolesti štitne žlezde su izazvane kombinacijom genetske predispozicije i okidača iz okoline (jod, selen, lekovi, pušenje, infekcije, stres). Za ove bolesti je karakteristična limfocitna infiltracija štitne žlezde i proizvodnja specifičnih antitireoidnih antitela (87, 88). U genetski predisponiranim osobama disrupcija imuno-endokrinih interakcija faktorima iz okoline dovodi do disbalansa između Th1 i Th2 imunog odgovora. To rezultira Th1 ćelijama posredovanom autoimunom reakcijom sa destrukcijom tireocita i hipotireoidizmom u Hašimoto tireoiditisu, a hiperreakтивnim Th2-posredovanim humoralnim odgovor usmeren na TSH receptor sa stimulatornim antitelima dovodi do hipertireoidizma u Grejvsovoj bolesti (87).

Vitamin D igra značajnu ulogu u modulaciji imunog odgovora, pojačavajući nativni, a inhibišući stečeni imuni odgovor (75, 89). Većina imunih ćelija, pre svega T limfociti, B limfociti, APC kao što su dendritske ćelije i makrofazi imaju VDR (vitamin D receptor) i 1α-hidroksilazu (75, 76, 90). Na nivou antigen prezentujućih ćelija, 1,25(OH)₂D inhibira površinsku ekspresiju proteina MHC II klase i kostimulacionih molekula i sprečava diferencijaciju i maturaciju dendritskih ćelija, kao i njihovu aktivaciju i preživljanje, što dovodi do smanjenje prezentacije antigena i t.celijske aktivnosti. Takođe, 1,25(OH)₂D posredno inhibira produkciju IL-12 i IL-23, a pospešuje oslobađanje IL-10. Stoga, 1,25(OH)₂D indirektno pomera balans imunog odgovora od Th1 i Th17 imunog odgovora, do Th2 imunog odgovora (90, 91). 1,25(OH)₂D inhibira proliferaciju, diferencijaciju i produkciju citokina (IL-2 i interferon-γ) Th1 ćelija, kao i Th-17 citokina (IL-17 i IL-21), ali takođe pospešuje produkciju antiinflamatornih Th2 citokina (IL-3, IL-4, IL-5 i IL-10). Aktivni oblik vitamina D takođe inhibira proliferaciju B limfocita i njihovu diferencijaciju u plazma ćelije, suzbija sekreciju imunoglobulina (IgG i IgM), sprečava stvaranje memorijskih B limfocita i indukuje apoptozu B limfocita (75, 76, 89–92). Sposobnost 1,25(OH)₂D da suzbije stečeni imuni sistem pomaže razvijanju imune tolerancije i ispostavila se blagotvornom u brojnim autoimunim bolestima (75, 76).

Gvožđe je važan mikronutrijent za održavanje ćelijske energije i metabolizma (93). Gvožđe je široko rasprostranjeno na Zemlji i esencijalna je komponenta svakog živog organizma (94, 95). Uprkos širokoj rasprostranjenosti ovog elementa, gvožđe je često ograničujući faktor u okolini (96). Ovaj naizgled paradoks je posledica osobine gvožđa da u kontaktu s kiseonikom formira okside, koji su veoma nerastvorljivi i stoga nedostupni za apsorpciju od strane živog sveta. Razni cellularni mehanizmi su razvijeni kako bi gvožđe iz okoline moglo da se iskoristi u biološki korisnom obliku. Siderofore koje sekretuju mikroorganizmi (97), kao i mehanizmi za redukciju gvožđa iz nerastvorljivog trovalentnog u rastvorljivi dvovalentni oblik u nekim kvasnicama (98) su dobri primjeri gvožđa iz okoline moglo da se iskoristi u biološki korisnom obliku. Gvožđe se u ishrani javlja u 2 oblika: Hem i non-Hem. Primarni izvor Hem gvožđa su hemoglobin i mioglobin iz mesa i ribe, dok je non-Hem gvožđe prisutno u žitaricama, legumima, voću i povrću. Hem gvožđe ima bolju iskoristljivost iz hrane.
(15–35%) nego non-Hem gvožđe (2–20%) (99). Doduše, u ishrani je non-Hem gvožđe prisutno u većoj meri, stoga, bez obzira na njegovu lošu iskoristljivost, više gvožđa u ovom obliku se unese u organizam nego u Hem obliku (100).

Deficijencija gvožđa se manifestuje kao nisko serumsko gvožđe i niži nivoi feritina. Smatra se za najčešći nutritivni deficit i može dovesti do nepoželjnih efekata na tireoidni metabolizam u ženama u reproduktivnoj dobi, kao i trudnicama (101, 102). Istraživanja su pokazala da deficit gvožđa negativno utiče na tireoidnu funkciju tako što interferira transport kiseonika ili utiče na aktivnost tireoidne peroksidaze (103, 104). Deficit gvožđa po nekim studijama duplira rizik od razvijanja hipotireoidizma (105, 106). Treba naglasiti da te studije nisu ispitivale povezanost između deficita gvožđa i tireoidne autoimunosti.

Što se tiče uticaja deficita gvožđa na nivoe antitela na tireoidne antigene (anti-TPO, anti-Tg, anti-TSH), jedne studije govore da se kod ispitanika sa deficitom ovog mikronutrijenta češće vide prisustvo ovih antitela (107), dok druge govore da se čak kod ispitanika sa deficitom rede videju antitireoidna antitela (108). Retke su studije koje pokazuju asocijaciju između tireoidne autoimunosti i deficita gvožđa (109, 110). Studije sprovođene na pacovima su pokazale da deficit gvožđa smanjuje serumске koncentracije tireoidnih hormona tako što smanjuje aktivnost hepatičke tiroksin dejodinaze, remeti perifernu konverziju T4 u T3 i smanjuje odgovor TSH na TRH (111). Pretpostavlja se da deficit gvožđa utiče na fidbek tireoidnih hormona, stimulira hipofizu da sekretuje TSH. Takođe, gvožđe igra važnu ulogu u normalnom funkcionisanju tireoperoksidaze (TPO), hem-zavisnog proteina. Gvožđe takođe učestvuje u pospešivanju djestva joda u štitastoj žlezdi (112, 113). Feritin se vrlo često koristi kao marker perifernih rezistencija na tireoidne hormone (114).

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THE INFLUENCE OF VITAMIN D AND IRON ON THYROID FUNCTION AND THYROID AUTOIMMUNITY

Consideration of autoimmunity as a cause of disease began when immunology itself began in 1901 with Ehrlich’s term Horror autotoxicus. Three years later, the cold autoantibody autohemolysin was described, responsible for paroxysmal hemoglobinuria, but without forming any lasting concept of autoimmunity as the cause of this disease. Ehrlich’s doctrine admittedly did not help in accepting the concept of autoimmunity, nor did the focus of immunology in that period on external causes instead of internal ones. Between 1915 and 1945, immunology turned to other fields of research, although studies related to autoimmunity were carried out, and in 1945 there was an expansion of autoimmunity research. The term was generally accepted only around 1965 (1).

Autoimmune diseases represent a spectrum of diseases caused by inflammation, due to the production of autoantibodies and the consequent cytotoxic action of T lymphocytes. Data indicate differences in the prevalence of autoimmune diseases between Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (defined as zone 1) and Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and South America (zone 2) (2). In most autoimmune diseases, women make up >85% of patients. Only in some autoimmune diseases with childhood presentation, such as diabetes mellitus type 1, the risk of the disease is equal for both sexes. There are three peaks for the onset of autoimmune diseases: between the ages of 8 and 10 (juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, DM type 1), between the ages of 33 and 50 (myasthenia gravis, multiple sclerosis, SLE, scleroderma, Graves’ disease) and between the ages of 52 and 63 (Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, adult rheumatoid arthritis) (3).

Autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland are the most prevalent organ-specific diseases and affect 2-5% of the population (4), with great variability between the sexes (5-15% of women, 1-5% of men) (5). The two most significant entities within autoimmune thyroid diseases are Hashimoto’s thyroiditis and Graves’ disease. These diseases are the result of loss of immune tolerance of own antigens. There is a cellular...
and humoral immune response against thyroid gland antigens with reactive infiltration of T and B lymphocytes, production of autoantibodies and then the development of clinical manifestations of the disease (6, 7). These are diseases of multifactorial etiology, with a complex interaction between environmental factors and genetic predisposition (8).

Genetics play a significant role in the pathogenesis of autoimmune thyroid diseases. Some of the genes responsible for these autoimmune diseases are common to Hashimoto’s and Graves’ disease, while genes specific to one of these 2 diseases have also been identified (9). The association between HLA genes and these diseases is well known. This explains some similarities in the pathological findings between Hashimoto’s thyroiditis and Graves’ disease, because in both diseases the presentation is dependent on certain HLA-B and HLA-DR, which suggests that hereditary risk factors are important in the pathogenesis of these diseases (10, 11). In addition to HLA genes, other genes responsible for the immune system are also responsible for the development of all autoimmune diseases, as well as autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland, which speaks in favor of genetic susceptibility to autoimmune diseases. Polymorphisms in certain CTLA-4 alleles are associated with a predisposition to Hashimoto’s thyroiditis and Graves’ disease (12–16). In a study conducted on 379 patients in Great Britain, 42% of patients in the test group had the G allele of the CLA-4 gene, while 32% in the control group had that allele (16). This genetic abnormality was associated with stimulation of thyroid antibody production and clinical presentation of autoimmune thyroiditis in interaction with other loci also responsible for genetic predisposition to this disease (6, 13, 16, 17). CD40 is found only on follicular cells of the thyroid gland and on B lymphocytes. The polymorphism of this gene is associated with a 20-30% increase in translation of the mRNA transcript of CD40 in patients with autoimmune thyroid diseases (18). Polymorphism of the PTPN22 gene, which encodes a negative regulator of T lymphocyte activation, has been linked to both autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland and autoimmune diseases in general (9). Abnormalities in the FOXP3 gene, which is responsible for the differentiation of T lymphocytes into Treg cells, have been linked to the juvenile form of Graves’ disease (19). Changes in the CD25 gene are also associated with Graves’ disease (20).

Although the link between genetic susceptibility and environmental factors thyroiditis is clear, the mechanism by which genetic variability interacts with environmental factors in autoimmune diseases is still not fully understood. Recent data point to the role of epigenetic mechanisms. Epigenetic modulation of gene expression can be manifested by changes in DNA methylation, histone modification (acetylation, deacetylation, methylation), as well as RNA interference via microRNA molecules. More recently, it has been shown that IFN-α induces alteration in the thyroglobulin gene through epigenetic changes in histones (21). Given that IFN-α is secreted locally during viral infections, this could explain the mechanism by which infections could trigger the
The influence of vitamin D and iron on thyroid function and thyroid development of autoimmune thyroid diseases (22). Another epigenetic phenomenon described in the pathogenesis of autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland is the inactivation of the X chromosome. The degree of inactivation of the X chromosome is a significant factor in the increased tendency of women to these autoimmune diseases, according to the study by Yin et al. (23).

Numerous environmental factors are associated with the occurrence of autoimmune thyroid diseases such as low birth weight, iodine excess, selenium deficiency, stress, smoking, allergies, radiation exposure, drugs, viral or bacterial infections, as well as fetal microchimerism (24). Smoking is one of the more important environmental factors related to this disease, if not the most important factor (25). Cigarette smoke contains cyanide, which is metabolized to thiocyanate, which can disrupt iodine concentrations in the thyroid gland (26). There is evidence to suggest that the involvement of infections in the pathogenesis of these diseases is very significant. However, even non-pathogenic microorganisms, normal inhabitants of the human microflora, induce a pro-inflammatory or regulatory immune response in the host (27). There are data that B. Burgdoferi and Y. Enterocolitica are frequent triggers of thyroid autoimmunity. Molecular mimicry is hypothesized to be the way in which these two microorganisms elicit an autoimmune response (28, 29). Some other microorganisms that are assumed to play the role of triggers in autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland are H. Pylori, Coxsackie virus, hepatitis C virus and retroviruses (29).

Although iodine is necessary for the functioning of the thyroid gland, it is also one of the most important causes of thyroid dysfunction. A mild iodine deficiency is associated with a reduced prevalence of Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, while a mild excess of this element is associated with a higher prevalence of this autoimmune disease. Potential mechanisms by which iodine could induce thyroid autoimmunity include direct stimulation of the immune response in the thyroid gland, increased immunogenicity of highly iodinated thyroglobulin, and the direct toxic effect of iodine on thyrocytes through the generation of free radicals (30–32). Kahaly et al. followed a group of patients with endemic goiter who received iodine for 6 months and a group with the same condition who received T4. A high titer of thyroid antibodies was found in 16% of patients receiving iodine treatment. After they stopped taking iodine, antibody levels decreased significantly and after 4 years were normal in 4 of 6 patients (30).

The most common manifestation of radiation on the thyroid gland is hypofunction both due to direct destruction of the gland and due to stimulation of thyroid antibodies (29). Autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland have also occurred with the therapeutic application of radiation (33), as well as with exposure to radiation in the environment (34). In a study conducted on 160 people who were exposed to radiation at the workplace, 10% of them met the criteria for the diagnosis of autoimmune
thyroiditis, while in the control group only 3.4% met the criteria. Subjects who were exposed to radiation for more than 5 years were at greater risk (35).

Many pollutants present in the environment have been shown to cause autoimmune thyroid diseases (36). For example, a high prevalence of hypothyroidism was observed, with elevated values of anti-TPO and anti-Tg, in individuals exposed to polybrominated biphenyls. Bisphenol A, often used in the production of plastics, could bind to the TSHR as a competitive antagonist of T3 (31, 36, 37).

Several drugs play a role in the pathogenesis of autoimmune thyroid diseases. IFN-α, IL-2, lithium, amiodarone, and highly active retroviral therapy are the agents most commonly associated with thyroid dysfunction (29, 31). For most of these drugs, it is true that patients with the highest risk of developing autoimmune thyroiditis are those who, before the use of this therapy, already had elevated levels of thyroid antibodies (29, 31, 36). Some drugs, such as lithium, although not direct triggers of autoimmunity, accelerate autoimmune processes by interfering with the synthesis of thyroid hormones. Thyroid function testing, as well as the measurement of the anti-TPO titer should be considered before the introduction of these drugs into therapy (24).

Mechanisms by which stress could induce thyroid autoimmunity are the induction of immunosuppression by antigen non-specific mechanisms, probably due to the effects of cortisol and CRH on immune cells, which is followed by immune hyperreactivity and consequent autoimmune disease of the thyroid gland. It is believed that postpartum thyroidism has a similar mechanism of origin. However, so far there is no evidence linking stress with thyroid autoimmunity, probably because the stressful event and the damage to this gland itself are separated in time (29, 31, 36).

Fetal cells have been identified in the thyroid glands of mothers suffering from autoimmune thyroiditis. Such cells could cause graft versus host disease in the thyroid gland and thus could play a significant role in the pathogenesis of Hashimoto’s thyroiditis (38,39). This mechanism of thyroid autoimmunity is still at the level of a hypothesis.

These diseases are generally accompanied by the presence of anti-TPO (thyroid peroxidase), anti-Tg (thyroglobulin), or anti-TSH receptor antibodies. There are also antibodies against other target antigens (carbonic anhydrase 2, megalin, T3, T4, Na-I transporter, pendrin), but they are rarely encountered in practice (40). Thyroid peroxidase is a weakly glycosylated membrane-bound enzyme responsible for iodine oxidation and iodination of the tyrosyl residue of the thyroglobulin molecule (41). Anti-TPO antibodies from healthy individuals did not block TPO activity (42), while anti-TPO antibodies from patients with autoimmune thyroid diseases destroyed thyrocytes and inhibited the enzymatic activity of TPO by competitive inhibition (43). Anti-TPO antibodies are more common than anti-Tg antibodies and therefore a better indicator of thyroid autoimmunity (44). Anti-TPO antibodies are also an inducer of oxidative stress because they reduce the antioxidant potential (45). Although these antibodies
have a cytotoxic effect on thyrocytes in Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, they have no established role in Graves’ disease (46).

Thyroglobulin is a large (600kDa) glycoprotein consisting of dimers and an average of 2–3 molecules of T4 and 0.3 molecules of T3. This molecule is heterogeneous in terms of content, glycosylation and structure. Antibody production against Tg can be induced by massive destruction of the thyroid gland, although high levels of Tg in the blood do not necessarily induce antibody production. Of the 40 epitopes on the Tg molecule that have been identified, according to some authors 6 and according to others 1–2 are immunogenic (47, 48). Healthy individuals have low levels of anti-Tg antibodies, generally below the threshold required for laboratory detection. In the presence of elevated serum levels of Tg due to the destruction of thyroid tissue, changed conformation of the thyroglobulin molecule due to high levels of I2 and increased TSH, the titer of anti-Tg antibodies also increases abnormally (48). Administration of I2 to subjects induced anti-Tg antibody production in 8–20% of subjects, associated with intrathyroidal lymphocytic infiltrate in some patients (49).

Hashimoto’s thyroiditis is a chronic inflammation of the thyroid gland first described more than 100 years ago, but the etiopathogenesis is still not fully defined (50). It is considered the most common autoimmune disease (51, 52), the most common endocrine disorder (53), as well as the most common cause of hypothyroidism (54, 55).

Hashimoto’s thyroiditis was first described by Dr. Hakara Hashimoto in 1912, studying thyroid specimens from 4 middle-aged women who had their glands removed for compressive symptoms. This disease was considered rare until the fifties of the last century, and now it is the most frequent autoimmune disease, with an incidence of 1 per 1,000 people per year, and a prevalence of 8 per 1,000 if the revisions of scientific articles in the field of endocrinology are taken as a source (50), and 46 per 1000 if only biochemically confirmed thyroiditis and thyroid antibodies are considered (56). This autoimmune disease is up to 8 times more common in women than in men, also the white and yellow races suffer more often than the black (50). In 2 Chinese studies, increased dietary iodine intake was correlated with an increased occurrence of Hashimoto’s thyroiditis in the population (57, 58). In Denmark, after the introduction of a mandatory salt iodization program, they saw an increase in the prevalence of elevated anti-TPO antibodies as well as Hashimoto’s thyroiditis (59). Etiologically, this disease can be divided into primary and secondary forms.

Primary thyroiditis includes all cases without a clear etiology. Clinically-pathologically, primary Hashimoto’s thyroiditis includes 6 entities: classic form (60), fibrotic form, IgG4 variant (61), juvenile form (62), Hashitoxicosis and painless (silent) thyroiditis (occurs as isolated and postpartum) (63). Clinically, the most common manifestation is enlargement of the thyroid gland (goiter), which goes with or without accompanying hypothyroidism. The most common pathological finding is significant lymphocytic infiltration of the thyroid gland. Primary Hashimoto’s thyroiditis can manifest itself as an isolated disease, but it can often occur together with
various other autoimmune diseases (diabetes type 1, Sjogren’s syndrome), or thyroid gland diseases. Among the diseases of the thyroid gland, it is important to mention the association between primary Hashimoto’s thyroiditis and papillary carcinoma of the thyroid gland, which is between 0.5 and 30%, depending on the source (60,64).

Secondary thyroiditis are forms of this disease with an established etiological agent. Most often, they are of iatrogenic origin, as a consequence of immunomodulatory drug therapy (eg the use of interferon-α in hepatitis C therapy) (65). During the past 10 years, the development of anticancer immunotherapy has led to the emergence of many immune-mediated diseases, including thyroiditis, which can be seen in the use of monoclonal antibodies that block CTLA-4 (66), as well as in the example of vaccines against malignant diseases (67).

Hashimoto’s thyroiditis is a prototype organ-specific autoimmune disease. Often, patients with this disease either have other autoimmune diseases, or have someone in the family with other diseases of this type (68), which indicates the genetic origin of these diseases. Hashimoto’s thyroiditis (69) and systemic lupus (70) are the first two autoimmune diseases for which a genetic component was proven in the early seventies of the last century, in the genes for MHC class II proteins. However, in the last 4 decades, only a few more genes associated with the tendency to thyroiditis have been found, although the mechanism by which they influence the occurrence of this disease has not been established (71).

In Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, both thyrocytes and the interstitium surrounding the follicles are affected. The classic form of this disease is mainly presented by an enlarged, grayish thyroid gland, with characteristic interstitial infiltration by predominantly lymphocytes with some plasma cells and macrophages (50). Within the gland, lymphocytes are organized into lymph follicles (tertiary, ectopic), with all the structural characteristics of a true lymph follicle. Fibrosis of the interstitium also occurs. Thyrocytes are atrophic in some parts of the gland, and enlarged in others, with a hyperchromatized nucleus and a cytoplasm full of mitochondria (72). Fibrous type of thyroiditis is characterized by an enlarged, hard and lobulated thyroid gland. Fibrosis in this disease does not break through the capsule, in contrast to Riedel’s thyroiditis, in which adhesions of the gland to the surrounding structures occur. Chronic inflammation of lymphocytes, also organized into follicles, occurs in this type as well. In the late stage of the disease, as in older patients, the fibrous variant manifests as idiopathic myxedema, where the thyroid tissue is reduced to a small fibrous bud (50).

The IgG4 variant was first described in Japan in 2009. Pathologically, it is defined by pronounced lympho-plasmacytic infiltration, with the fact that in this variant of the disease, the infiltrate contains a large number of IgG4-producing plasma cells (>20 cells per visual field). Interstitial fibrosis is not expressed as in the previously described two forms.
The other 3 forms (juvenile, Hashitoxicosis, painless thyroiditis) rarely require thyroidectomy, therefore there are not many pathohistological samples taken from patients with these types of diseases. They have characteristics similar to the other forms, with the fact that the fibrosis is milder and the appearance of lymph follicles is not so common.

The diagnosis of Hashimoto’s thyroiditis is made on the basis of clinical features, the presence of serum antibodies against thyroid antigens (anti-TPO, anti-TG) as well as findings of ultrasound of the thyroid gland. Additional tests that are performed less often, but contribute to better diagnosis, are scintigraphy of the thyroid gland to detect uptake of radioactive iodine isotope in the thyroid gland, as well as cytological examination of thyroid aspirate (50).

The manifestations of Hashimoto’s thyroiditis vary according to the nature of the disease itself. Initially, patients may have hyperthyroid symptoms, caused by the initial destruction of thyroid cells and the subsequent release of thyroid hormones into the bloodstream. When the released hormones are metabolized, due to the destruction of thyroid cells, hypothyroidism occurs. The symptoms of hypothyroidism are insidious, variable and can affect almost any organ or organ system in the body.

Skin manifestations include dry skin, especially on the extensor sides of the hands and feet, pale skin due to accumulation of dermal mucopolysaccharides and consequent greater water retention, as well as myxedema in more severe forms of this disease. Hair growth is slowed, and hair is often brittle and dry. Alopecia is also a relatively common manifestation. Peripheral vascular resistance can drop up to 60%, and cardiac output can decrease up to 50%. Bradycardia may also occur. Fatigue, dyspnea on exertion, as well as exertion intolerance occur due to limited pulmonary and cardiac reserve, as well as due to muscle weakness. Early symptoms may include constipation, fatigue, dry skin, and weight gain. In the later stages of the disease, there is cold intolerance, reduced sweating, peripheral neuropathies, lack of energy, depression, dementia, memory loss, muscle spasms, joint pain, hair loss, apnea, menorrhagia, as well as compressive symptoms in the neck area due to an enlarged thyroid gland and hoarseness. During the examination, attention should be paid to cold and dry skin, periorbital edema, brittle nails, bradycardia, delayed tendon reflex relaxation phase, increased blood pressure, slowed speech, ataxia and macroGLOSSIA (73).

Vitamin D is a steroid molecule produced mainly in the skin, which regulates the expression of a large number of genes (74). There are two forms of vitamin D, vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), and vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol). Cholecalciferol is produced in the skin after exposure to UVB radiation, although it can also be found in some foods such as some fatty fish, while ergocalciferol is produced by plants and fungi (75, 76). Vitamin D is incorporated from the digestive tract into chylomicrons, which reach the lymphatic system and then the venous blood. This vitamin, whether from the skin or from the diet, is biologically inert until it undergoes its first
hydroxylation in the liver to form 25(OH)D. Vitamin D requires another hydroxylation in the kidneys, when the biologically active form of vitamin D, 1,25(OH)2D, is formed (77). This active form of vitamin D stimulates the intestinal absorption of calcium. Without vitamin D, only 10–15% of calcium and about 60% of phosphorus are absorbed from food (77, 78). The receptor for vitamin D is found in almost all tissues and cells in the body. 1,25(OH)2D has a wide range of effects in the body, such as inhibition of cell proliferation, induction of terminal cell differentiation, inhibition of angiogenesis, stimulation of insulin production, and inhibition of renin production (79–81). The biologically active form of vitamin D is responsible for the activation and suppression of between 200 and 500 genes, which constitutes about 3% of the human genome (82). The main role of vitamin D is regulation of bone metabolism and regulation of calcium and phosphorus homeostasis. Recent research has shown that vitamin D deficiency, which is widespread, could also have manifestations beyond the bone system, in the form of autoimmune diseases, tumors, metabolic syndromes, etc. (74, 83, 84). Low serum vitamin D levels are also associated with autoimmune thyroid diseases such as Hashimoto’s thyroiditis and Graves’ disease (82, 85, 86). Autoimmune diseases of the thyroid gland are caused by a combination of genetic predisposition and triggers from the environment (Iodine, Selenium, drugs, smoking, infections, stress). These diseases are characterized by lymphocytic infiltration of the thyroid gland and the production of specific antithyroid antibodies (87, 88). In genetically predisposed individuals, the disruption of immune-endocrine interactions by environmental factors leads to an imbalance between Th1 and Th2 immune responses. This results in a Th1 cell-mediated autoimmune reaction with thyrocyte destruction and hypothyroidism in Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, and a hyperreactive Th2-mediated humoral response directed at the TSH receptor with stimulatory antibodies leads to hyperthyroidism in Graves’ disease (87). Vitamin D plays a significant role in modulating the immune response, enhancing the native and inhibiting the acquired immune response (75, 89). Most immune cells, primarily T lymphocytes, B lymphocytes, APCs such as dendritic cells and macrophages have VDR (vitamin D receptor) and 1α-hydroxylase (75, 76, 90). At the level of antigen-presenting cells, 1,25(OH)2D inhibits the surface expression of MHC class II proteins and costimulatory molecules and prevents the differentiation and maturation of dendritic cells as well as their activation and survival, which leads to a decrease in antigen presentation and cellular activity. Also, 1,25(OH)2D indirectly inhibits the production of IL-12 and IL-23, and promotes the release of IL-10. Therefore, 1,25(OH)2D indirectly shifts the balance of the immune response from Th1 and Th17 immune responses, to Th2 immune responses (90, 91). 1,25(OH)2D inhibits the proliferation, differentiation, and production of cytokines (IL-2 and interferon-γ) of Th1 cells, as well as Th-17 cytokines (IL-17 and IL-21), but also promotes the production of anti-inflammatory Th2 cytokines (IL-3, IL-4, IL-5 and IL-10). The active form of vitamin D also inhibits the proliferation of B lymphocytes and their differentiation into plasma cells, suppresses the secretion of
immunoglobulins (IgG and IgM), prevents the formation of memory B lymphocytes and induces apoptosis of B lymphocytes (75, 76, 89–92). The ability of 1,25(OH)2D to suppress the acquired immune system helps develop immune tolerance and has been shown to be beneficial in a number of autoimmune diseases (75, 76).

Iron is an important micronutrient for maintaining cellular energy and metabolism (93). Iron is widely distributed on Earth and is an essential component of every living organism (94, 95). Despite the widespread distribution of this element, iron is often a limiting factor in the environment (96). This apparent paradox is a consequence of iron’s ability to form oxides in contact with oxygen, which are very insoluble and therefore unavailable for absorption by the living world. Various cellular mechanisms have been developed so that iron from the environment can be used in a biologically useful form. Siderophores secreted by microorganisms (97), as well as the mechanisms for the reduction of iron from the insoluble trivalent to the soluble divalent form in some yeasts (98) are good examples of the aforementioned cellular mechanisms.

Iron occurs in the diet in 2 forms: Heme and non-Heme. The primary source of heme iron is hemoglobin and myoglobin from meat and fish, while non-heme iron is present in grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables. Heme iron has a better availability from food (15-35%) than non-heme iron (2–20%) (99). Admittedly, non-heme iron is present to a greater extent in the diet, so regardless of its poor utilization, more iron in this form is taken into the body than in the Heme form (100).

Iron deficiency manifests as low serum iron and lower ferritin levels. It is considered the most common nutritional deficiency and can lead to undesirable effects on thyroid metabolism in women of reproductive age as well as pregnant women (101, 102). Research has shown that iron deficiency negatively affects thyroid function by interfering with oxygen transport or affecting thyroid peroxidase activity (103, 104). According to some studies, iron deficiency doubles the risk of developing hypothyroidism (105, 106). It should be emphasized that these studies did not examine the association between iron deficiency and thyroid autoimmunity.

Regarding the effect of iron deficiency on the levels of antibodies to thyroid antigens (anti-TPO, anti-Tg, anti-TSH), one study says that the presence of these antibodies is more often seen in subjects with a deficiency of this micronutrient (107), while others say that even in subjects with a deficiency, antithyroid antibodies are less often seen (108). Studies showing an association between thyroid autoimmunity and iron deficiency are rare (109, 110). Studies in rats have shown that iron deficiency reduces serum thyroid hormone concentrations by reducing hepatic thyroxine deiodinase activity, disrupting peripheral conversion of T4 to T3, and reducing the TSH response to TRH.

Iron deficiency is thought to affect thyroid hormone feedback, stimulating the pituitary gland to secrete TSH. Also, iron plays an important role in the normal functioning of thyroperoxidase (TPO), a heme-dependent protein. Iron also participates in enhancing the action of iodine in the thyroid gland (112, 113).
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