

Hashimoto encephalopathy is a rare disorder characterized by impaired brain function (encephalopathy). The exact cause is unknown, but it is believed to be an immune-mediated disorder or a disorder in which there is inflammation resulting from abnormal functioning of the immune system. Affected individuals have the presence of antithyroid antibodies in their body. Antibodies are part of the immune system; they are specialized proteins that target foreign or invading organisms. Antithyroid antibodies are ones that mistakenly target thyroid tissue. However, it is unclear whether these antibodies play any role in the development of Hashimoto encephalopathy or are a coincidental finding. The main signs and symptoms are related to the encephalopathy. The onset of impaired brain function is rapid (acute), while other times it can develop slowly over many years. The specific symptoms, severity, and course of the disorder can vary greatly among affected individuals. The disorder often responds to therapy with corticosteroids. Hashimoto encephalopathy is a rare disease that affects women more often than men. The disorder is estimated to affect 2.1 per 100,000 individuals in the general population. It can affect children, but only approximately 60 affected children have been described in the medical literature. Rare disorders often go misdiagnosed or undiagnosed making it difficult to determine the true frequency in the general population.