

Thyroid Disease

What is the thyroid?

The thyroid is a small butterfly-shaped gland just below the Adam's apple that controls the body's metabolism by producing thyroid hormones, which regulate how fast the body works and how much energy is used.

Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism occurs when there is too much thyroid hormone present in the body. Symptoms can include a fast heart rate, nervousness, increased perspiration, muscle weakness, trembling hands, weight loss, changes in skin thickness, increased frequency of bowel movements, decreased menstrual flow and less frequent periods, palpitations, goiter, exophthalmos (bulging eyes).

- Hyperthyroidism is ten times more frequent in women than men, and affects about 2% of the women in the United States. Causes of hyperthyroidism may be a gland that is producing too much hormone, or one or more lumps in the gland that are overactive. The gland may also be inflamed, causing the release of thyroid hormone that has been stored in the gland. Some patients may also experience symptoms of hyperthyroidism if they are taking too much thyroid hormone replacement. Some drugs may also cause the thyroid to produce too much hormone.
 - Grave's Disease is the most common form of hyperthyroidism. It is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system produces antibodies against the thyroid gland, causing the thyroid to over-produce thyroid hormones.
 - The basic goal of treatment is to return the thyroid hormone levels back to normal. Anti-thyroid drugs, such as PTU or Tapazole are used to stop the gland from functioning. Treatment may include radioactive iodine to shrink an enlarged gland or toxic nodule that is producing too much hormone. Surgery may be used to remove a cancerous nodule in the gland. Other medications like beta blockers (Inderal) are used to treat the symptoms of hyperthyroidism while waiting for the other treatments to work.
 - Many patients who are treated for hyperthyroidism will eventually become hypothyroid. These individuals then need to take thyroid hormone replacement and should be followed regularly by their health care provider.
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Hypothyroidism

Hypothyroidism occurs when too little thyroid hormone is present in the body. Symptoms include feeling tired or slow, feeling cold, depressed, drowsy or lethargic, a slow heart rate, poor memory, difficulty concentrating, muscle cramping, weight gain, husky voice, thinning hair, heavy menstrual flow, milky discharge from the breasts, and infertility.

- Hypothyroidism affects about three million people per year. It may occur when the thyroid gland function is stopped medically or surgically. Medical causes include thyroiditis, or inflammation of the thyroid gland. An inflammation can be due to autoimmune disease (Hashimoto's thyroiditis). Pregnancy and viral or bacterial infections can also precipitate thyroiditis. A goiter, another sign of hypothyroidism, is an abnormal enlargement of the thyroid gland. Thyroid lumps or nodules also occur in or on the thyroid gland. Most nodules (90%) are non-cancerous and do not need to be removed.
- Taking thyroid replacement hormone to ensure normal levels of energy and metabolism is the treatment for hypothyroidism. Once thyroid levels are stable, blood tests are done if symptoms reoccur, or yearly to ensure that levels have remained stable.

Check our website: www.uhs.berkeley.edu to learn more about this medical concern or others.

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Clinic Nurse 643-7197 for advice