

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HYPOTHYROIDISM

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What Is Hypothyroidism?

The thyroid is a small gland in the front of your neck. It makes hormones that control how the body uses energy. Hypothyroidism is a common condition that occurs when the thyroid gland does not make enough hormone for your body's needs. There can be several causes, including:

- Hashimoto thyroiditis (an autoimmune condition where your body attacks the thyroid)
- Radiation treatment for head and neck cancer
- Treatment for an overactive thyroid
- Surgical removal of the thyroid
- Too little iodine (a mineral the body needs) in the diet
- Certain medicines

What Are Common Symptoms?

- Feeling tired all the time
- Rough, dry skin
- Constipation
- Feeling cold frequently
- Weight gain
- Puffy eyes

These symptoms are common to many other conditions. Sometimes, people have no symptoms at all. In older patients, the most common symptoms are feeling tired and weak. Because of this, blood testing is always needed to diagnose hypothyroidism.

Am I at Risk?

Hypothyroidism is more common in women than in men and increases with age. It occurs more often in people with autoimmune diseases, Down syndrome, and Turner syndrome. You may also be at higher risk if you have any of the following:

- A goiter (swelling of the thyroid gland in the front of your neck)
- Certain medical conditions, such as type 1 diabetes and celiac disease
- A history of head and neck radiation therapy
- A personal or family history of thyroid disease
- Use of certain medications

How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. The physical examination will include feeling your neck, where the thyroid gland is.
- You will have blood tests to measure your thyroid hormone levels.

Supplements containing biotin (commonly used for cosmetic skin, nail, and hair conditions) can affect blood test results. If you take these supplements, stop at least 3 days before having a blood test.



How Is It Treated?

Hypothyroidism is treated with thyroid hormone replacement, with the goal of improving symptoms and preventing complications. Thyroid hormone should be taken by mouth every day, preferably at bedtime. Symptoms usually get better within a few weeks of starting the medicine. Hypothyroidism is a permanent condition, so you will need to take medicine to replace thyroid hormone for the rest of your life.

It is important to take this medicine with lots of water and space it out from meals (1 hour before or 4 hours after) and any vitamin supplements containing iron, calcium, or soy so that your body can best absorb it.

After starting the medicine, you will have regular follow-up visits with your doctor. These visits will ensure that your symptoms are improving and that your hormone levels are in range. Follow-up blood tests every 6–8 weeks will show if your dose needs to be adjusted to get your levels within the correct range. Once your levels are in the correct range, they will only need to be checked every 3–6 months. The amount of medicine you need may change over time as your age and health status change.

Questions for My Doctor

- If I don't take thyroid hormone replacement medicine, what will happen?
- What are the risks and side effects of the treatment?
- What should I do if I miss a dose or two of the treatment?
- What are the differences between generic and brand-name hormone replacement?
- How often should I have follow-up visits?
- If I am pregnant or planning to become pregnant, what considerations should I be aware of?
- Will I need to see any other doctors?

For More Information



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American Thyroid Association
www.thyroid.org/hypothyroidism

MedlinePlus
<https://medlineplus.gov/hypothyroidism.html>