

Thyroid disease awareness

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Why is the thyroid gland important:

The thyroid gland is responsible for producing hormones. It is part of the human endocrine system within the body.

These hormones keep many processes of the body, including metabolism, mood, breathing, and heart rate, running smoothly.

The thyroid is a small butterfly shaped gland that is in the middle of the lower neck.

Although the thyroid gland is relatively small, it produces a hormone that influences every cell, tissue and organ in the body.

The two most common issues with the thyroid gland:

- Hyperthyroidism or overactive thyroid
- Hypothyroidism or underactive thyroid

Hyperthyroidism:

Hyperthyroidism is an overactive thyroid gland. It produces too much thyroid hormone. This can cause many of your body's functions to speed up.

Hyperthyroidism affects between 1 and 3 percent of people in the United States and is more common in women. Graves' disease is the most common cause of hyperthyroidism, affecting about 70 percent of people with an overactive thyroid:

Signs and symptoms:

- Weight loss despite an increased appetite
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Nervousness, irritability, trouble sleeping, fatigue
- Shaky hands, muscle weakness
- Sweating or trouble tolerating heat
- Frequent bowel movements
- An enlargement in the neck, called a goiter

Diagnosis and treatment:

A blood test measuring thyroid stimulating hormone.
An iodine uptake test and scan
Ultrasound

Treatment may include medication, radioiodine therapy or possible thyroidectomy.

Hypothyroidism:

Hypothyroidism is an underactive thyroid gland. Hypothyroidism means that the thyroid gland can't make enough thyroid hormone to keep the body running normally.

Common causes are autoimmune disease, such as Hashimoto's thyroiditis, or from having a surgical removal of the thyroid gland.

Hypothyroidism may not cause noticeable symptoms in its early stages. Over time, hypothyroidism that is not treated can lead to other health problems.

Signs and symptoms:

When thyroid hormone levels are too low, the cells in the body can't get enough thyroid hormone and the body's processes start slowing down. As the body slows, you may notice that you feel

- Colder
- You tire more easily
- Your skin is getting drier
- Forgetful and depressed
- Frequent constipation

Diagnosis and treatment:

A blood test measuring thyroid stimulating hormone and physical exam may be used to diagnose hypothyroidism.

Most cases of hypothyroidism are treated with hormone replacing medications prescribed by your physician.

It is always best to speak to your physician with any concerns or questions about your risk for thyroid disease.