

Thyroid Health

More important than you may think

About 15 million Americans suffer from thyroid disease.

About the Thyroid

The thyroid gland is a small, butterfly-shaped gland located at the base of the neck, just below the Adam's apple and right above the collarbone, encircling the windpipe. The thyroid helps control the function of many of the body's organs, including the heart, brain, liver, kidneys and skin, but mostly helps to set the metabolism.

The two types of thyroid disease are hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism.

Hyperthyroidism

This condition develops when the body is exposed to excessive amounts of thyroid hormone. The disease refers to an overactive thyroid gland, which produces too much thyroid hormone.

Symptoms include:

- Goiters
- Enlarged thyroid
- Rapid heart rate
- Nervous, anxious or irritable behavior
- Trembling hands
- Unexplained weight loss
- Heat intolerance
- Increased sweating
- Hair loss
- Diarrhea
- Sleeplessness

- Decreased menstrual flow or impaired fertility

Hypothyroidism

This is when the thyroid gland produces less than the normal amount of thyroid hormone, resulting in the decrease of many bodily functions. When the metabolism slows due to hypothyroidism, the following may occur:

- Fatigue
- Unexplained weight gain
- Dry skin and hair
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased cholesterol
- Intolerance to cold
- Constipation
- A heavier menstrual flow

Risk Factors

Risk factors for thyroid disease include:

- *Being female* – Women are five to eight times more likely to suffer from a thyroid disorder than men are.
- *Age* – The Thyroid Foundation of America recommends that women get annual thyroid

hormone level tests yearly starting at age 50; men should as well beginning at age 60.

- *A family history* – If the disease runs in the family, testing is recommended every 5 years after age 35.
- *Pregnancy* – Sometimes thyroid conditions may arise after giving birth.

Treatment

Treatment for hyperthyroidism usually includes prescription drugs, radioactive iodine therapy, and/or surgery. Hypothyroidism is commonly treated with a thyroid replacement hormone, which is a prescription drug.



Did you know...?

Hyperthyroidism is the most common type of thyroid disease. It is thought that as many as 15 percent of people diagnosed with depression are actually suffering from hyperthyroidism. It can be discovered with a simple blood test.