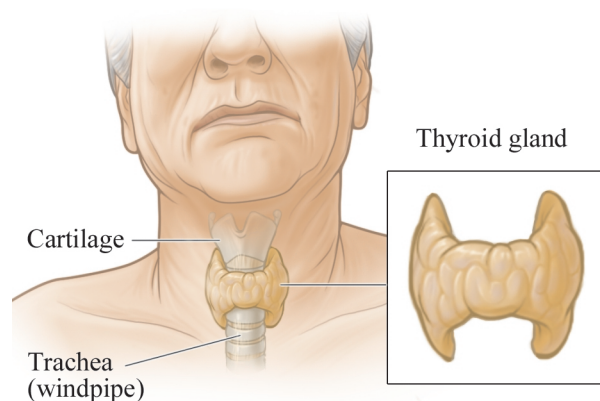


## Thyroid Disease: Hypothyroidism



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### What is hypothyroidism?

Hypothyroidism means your thyroid is not making enough thyroid hormone. Your thyroid is a gland in the front of your neck. It controls your metabolism, which is how your body turns food into energy. It also affects your heart, muscles, bones, and cholesterol.

Having a low level of thyroid hormone affects your whole body. It can make you feel tired and weak. If hypothyroidism is not treated, it can raise your cholesterol levels and make you more likely to have a heart attack or stroke. During pregnancy, untreated hypothyroidism can harm your baby. Fortunately, hypothyroidism is easy to treat.

People of any age can get hypothyroidism, but older adults are more likely to get it. Women age 60 and older have the highest risk. You are more likely to get the disease if it runs in your family.

The most common cause is Hashimoto's thyroiditis. It causes the body's immune system to attack thyroid tissue. As a result, the gland can't make enough thyroid hormone.

Other things that can lead to low levels of thyroid hormone include surgery to remove the thyroid gland and radiation therapy for cancer.

### What are the symptoms?

Hypothyroidism can cause many symptoms. You may:

- Feel tired, weak, or depressed.
- Have dry skin and brittle nails.
- Not be able to stand the cold.
- Be constipated.
- Have memory problems or have trouble thinking clearly.
- Have heavy or irregular menstrual periods.

### How is it diagnosed?

A blood test to find your thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) level can show if your thyroid hormone level is too low. A high TSH level may mean that you have low thyroid. When your body is not making enough thyroid hormone, TSH levels rise in an effort to make the body produce more.

### How is it treated?

Your doctor will treat you with the thyroid medicine levothyroxine (such as Levothroid, Levoxyl, or Synthroid). Most people start to feel better within a week or two. Your symptoms will probably go away within a few months. But you will likely need to keep taking the pills for the rest of your life. Occasionally, thyroid gland function returns on its own in Hashimoto's thyroiditis.

You will probably have another blood test 6 to 8 weeks after you start the medicine to make sure the dose is right for you.

If your dose of thyroid hormone is too high, you may develop complications such as irregular heartbeats and, over time, osteoporosis. If you have heart disease, too much medicine can cause pain (angina) and irregular heartbeats. If the amount of your medicine is too low, you will still have symptoms, such as sluggishness, constipation, confusion, and feeling cold.

While taking thyroid hormone medicine, most people will need to see their doctor once a year for a checkup and a TSH blood test to make sure they have a normal hormone level.

### What can you do at home?

Take your thyroid hormone medicine exactly as prescribed. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine. Most

people do not have side effects if they take the right amount of medicine regularly.

### Taking your medicine

- Take the medicine 30 minutes before breakfast, and do not take it with calcium, vitamins, or iron.
- Do not take extra doses of your thyroid medicine. It will not help you get better any faster, and it may cause side effects.
- If you forget to take a dose, do NOT take a double dose of medicine. Take your usual dose the next day.

### Questions to ask your doctor

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.