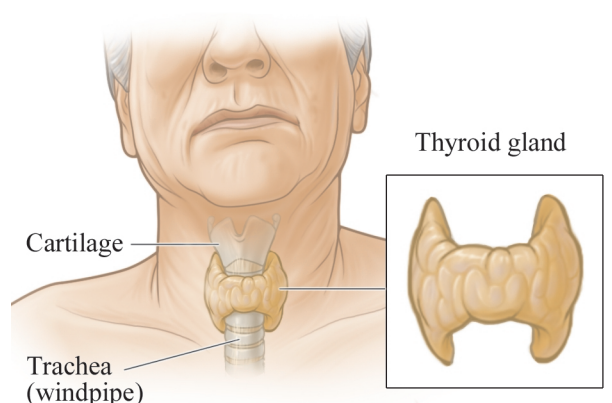


Thyroid Disease: Hyperthyroidism



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What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism means your thyroid makes too much 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 too much thyroid hormone can make a lot of things in your body speed up. You may lose weight quickly, have a fast heartbeat, sweat a lot, or feel nervous and moody.

Or you may have no symptoms at all. While your doctor is doing a test for another reason, he or she may discover that you have hyperthyroidism.

Graves' disease causes most hyperthyroidism. In Graves' disease, the body's natural defense (immune) system attacks the thyroid gland. The thyroid fights back by making too much thyroid hormone. Like many thyroid problems, it often runs in families.

Sometimes hyperthyroidism is caused by a swollen thyroid or small growths in the thyroid called thyroid nodules.

What are the symptoms?

Some people have no symptoms. But many people have one or more symptoms.

- You may feel nervous, moody, weak, or tired.
- Your hands may shake, your heart may beat fast, or you may have problems breathing.
- You may be sweaty or have warm, red, itchy skin.
- You may have more bowel movements than usual.
- You may have fine, soft hair that is falling out.
- You may lose weight even though you eat the same or more than usual.

How is it diagnosed?

A blood test to find your thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) level can show if you have hyperthyroidism. If your TSH is low, it may mean that you have too much thyroid hormone in your body. When your body is making too much thyroid hormone, TSH levels drop in an effort to make the body produce less thyroid hormones.

You also may have blood tests to check the level of your thyroid hormones.

How is it treated?

Radioactive iodine and antithyroid medicine are the treatments doctors use most often.

Radioactive iodine is the most common treatment.

Most people are cured after taking one dose. It destroys part of your thyroid gland, but it does not harm any other parts of your body. If your symptoms bother you, your doctor may give you pills called beta-blockers while you and your

doctor decide what your treatment should be. These can help you feel better.

Antithyroid medicine pills do not damage your thyroid gland. But they do not always work, and you have to take them at the same time every day. If they stop working, you may need to try radioactive iodine.

After treatment, you will need regular blood tests. These tests check to see if your hyperthyroidism has come back. They also check to see if you are making enough thyroid hormone.

What can you do at home?

Here are some ways to take care of yourself:

- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed. You need to take the thyroid medicine at the same time each day. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- If you need to gain weight, ask your doctor about special diets.
- Do not eat kelp. Kelp is high in iodine, which can make hyperthyroidism worse. Kelp is commonly used in sushi and other Japanese foods. You can use iodized salt and eat bread and seafood. Try to eat a balanced diet.
- Do not use caffeine and other stimulants. These can make symptoms worse, such as a fast heartbeat, nervousness, and problems focusing.

- Use creams or ointments for irritated skin. Ask your doctor which type to use.
- Tell all your doctors about your condition. They need to know because some medicines contain iodine.

Eye care with Graves' disease

Graves' disease can make your eyes sore.

- Use artificial tears, eye drops, and sunglasses to protect your eyes from dryness, wind, and sun.
- Raise your head with pillows at night to prevent your eyes from swelling. In some cases, taping your eyelids shut at night will keep your eyes from being dry in the morning.
- Do not smoke. Smoking can make your condition worse and may lead to more serious eye problems. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.