



HEALTH INFORMATION

Thyroid

What is your thyroid?

The thyroid gland, which is in your neck, sets the rate at which you produce energy from your body's stores by the release of thyroid hormones. The thyroid gland controls metabolism through the production of thyroid hormone. It may become overactive (hyperthyroidism) or underactive (hypothyroidism).

Symptoms

In hyperthyroidism, symptoms may include:

- Weight loss
- Rapid heartbeat
- Tremor
- Excessive sweating
- Heat intolerance
- Anxiety
- Muscle weakness
- Irregular periods

If the gland is underactive as in hypothyroidism, the following symptoms may occur:

- Exhaustion, tiredness
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Weight gain
- Dry hair, skin and nails
- Depression or anxiety
- Constipation

- Breathlessness and swelling of feet
- Face swelling and puffy eyes
- In women, heavy periods

Hyperthyroidism affects up to one in 50 people and can occur at any age, most commonly between 20 and 50.

Treatments

It's difficult to prevent thyroid illness. Hypothyroidism is treated with thyroid hormone medication. Treatment of hyperthyroidism may involve medication to reduce the production of thyroid hormone, radioactive iodine therapy or a thyroidectomy.

Causes

There are many causes of an overactive thyroid and you may need blood tests and scans to find out what's responsible.

The most common reason is autoimmune disease and in this case, it stimulates the thyroid to produce more hormones.

If you have a nodule or growth in the thyroid, it may also produce too much hormone.

Rarely, taking certain medicines can make the thyroid produce more hormone. Hypothyroidism is ten times more common in women than in men and usually occurs over the age of 40. It can lead to high cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease.

Again, there are many causes, but for some it seems to be part of the ageing process. Hypothyroidism is especially common in women after the menopause.