

Education

Hyperthyroidism: Brief Version

What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism happens when the thyroid gland makes too much thyroid hormone. (The thyroid gland is in the front of your neck.) Having too much thyroid hormone causes many symptoms. You may:

- Feel anxious.
- Be tired.
- Have trouble sleeping.
- Feel shaky.
- Feel sweaty and hot.
- Be short of breath.
- Have a hard time focusing your eyes.
- Lose weight.
- Notice your thyroid gland is swollen. (A swollen thyroid gland is called a goiter).

You may have other problems. Here are some of them:

- Your eyeballs may stick out.
- You may not be able to tolerate heat.
- Your heart may beat faster.
- You may want to eat more often.
- You may have diarrhea.

This disease can easily be treated. If it is not treated, with time it can cause heart failure and death.

How do I know if I have hyperthyroidism?

Your health care provider will:

- Ask about your symptoms.
- Give you an exam.
- Order blood tests. These tests will find out how much hormone your thyroid gland is making.
- You may also need a special x-ray to show how well your thyroid gland is working.

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How is it treated?

There are several choices for treating hyperthyroidism:

- Medicine.
- Radiation.
- Surgery.

You can take medicine that helps your thyroid gland make less hormone.

- In a couple of months, you should be doing better.
- You may have to take the medicine for a year or more.

You may be treated with radioactive medicine, which destroys the cells that are making too much hormone. Sometimes after radiation your thyroid makes too little thyroid hormone. Your health care provider can prescribe thyroid hormone medicine to treat this problem.

Another possible treatment is having surgery to take out all or part of the thyroid gland. Surgery cures the disease most of the time. You may have too little thyroid hormone after the surgery. You will then most likely need to take thyroid hormone the rest of your life.

Eye problems caused by hyperthyroidism may continue or even worsen after your thyroid problem is treated. Your provider may recommend steroid medicine or eyedrops for these problems.

How can I take care of myself?

- Make sure you follow your health care provider's advice.
- Do not stop taking your medicine or change the way you are taking it without talking to your health care provider first.
- Do not smoke. Smoking can worsen the eye problems that can happen with thyroid disease.

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