

# Hyperthyroidism

The thyroid gland is in the front, lower part of your neck and makes thyroid hormone. Hyperthyroidism, also called overactive thyroid, means your thyroid gland makes too much thyroid hormone. Thyroid hormone helps control metabolism, which is the process your body uses to turn food into energy.

With severe hyperthyroidism your metabolism increases. This can affect your heart, muscles, bones, and weight.

## Symptoms

Most people with mild hyperthyroidism have few or no symptoms. If hyperthyroidism is severe, you may experience some of these symptoms:

- Rapid or irregular heartbeat (also known as palpitations)
- Shaking, unsteady hands or legs
- Increased sweating or feeling hot
- Unexplained weight loss
- Insomnia
- Anxiety, nervousness, or irritability
- Fatigue
- Muscle weakness
- Frequent bowel movements or diarrhea
- Hair loss or a change in the texture of your hair or skin

## Causes

Hyperthyroidism has several possible causes.

**Graves' disease** is the most common cause. Graves' disease is a disorder of the immune system which causes an antibody that stimulates the thyroid to make too much thyroid hormone. Graves' disease may run in families with a strong history of hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism.

Other causes of hyperthyroidism include:

- Benign (noncancerous) thyroid lumps or growths (also known as nodules).
- Thyroiditis (inflammation of the thyroid gland) and goiter (an enlarged thyroid gland). These are less common causes.
- Ingestion of high amounts of iodine from food, medication, or some imaging contrast (such as contrast used in CT scans). This is also a less common cause.

## Diagnosis

We may use a combination of a physical exam, thyroid imaging tests, and blood tests to diagnose hyperthyroidism. To get an accurate diagnosis, it's important to know all medications and supplements you're taking.

## Treatment

If your hyperthyroidism is causing symptoms, we may recommend a medication called a beta blocker to help you feel better while we get you started on other treatments.

Hyperthyroidism can lead to serious health problems, so treatment will be recommended even if symptoms do not bother you. The best treatment option for you will depend on many factors, including your age. Some people need more than one kind of treatment, including:

- **Radioactive iodine**, which is the most common treatment. It's usually recommended for people with Graves' disease and for those who have a goiter or single thyroid nodule. Most people are cured after taking one dose.
- **Antithyroid medication**, which prevents your thyroid gland from making too much thyroid hormone. Most people can stop taking the medication after 1 to 2 years. Others may need to take the medication for many years.

During and after treatment, you'll need regular blood tests. These tests help guide the treatment. They allow us to see if your thyroid hormone level is normal.

If you have thyroiditis, we may recommend anti-inflammatory medications. Thyroid hormone supplements may also be needed for several months up to a year until the thyroid completely recovers from the inflammation.

Surgery is rarely recommended for hyperthyroidism.

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## Additional resources

For more health information, tools, classes, and other resources:

- Search [kp.org/mydoctor](https://kp.org/mydoctor)
- Contact your local Health Education Department

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.