

# Hypothyroidism

## *What is the thyroid?*

The thyroid is a small gland located at the base of the neck. Its job is to make thyroid hormone, which affects the metabolism of your body. When thyroid hormone levels are low (hypothyroidism), another hormone called thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH), usually rises.

## *What is hypothyroidism and what are the symptoms?*

Hypothyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland is not producing enough thyroid hormone. Patients with hypothyroidism usually have low thyroid hormone levels and elevated TSH. Symptoms can include:

- Fatigue
- Feeling cold much of the time
- Constipation
- Weight gain
- Dry skin
- Elevated cholesterol
- Irregular or heavy periods

## *How is hypothyroidism diagnosed?*

Your doctor will first do a blood test. Further tests will depend on these results on your individual case, and may include nuclear thyroid scan or ultrasound.

## *What causes hypothyroidism?*

Hypothyroidism can be caused by surgical removal or radiation of the thyroid gland, or by some medications, but most commonly it is caused by Hashimoto's thyroiditis, a common condition in which patients develop antibodies against the thyroid that cause inflammation and destruction of the thyroid gland.

## *How is hypothyroidism treated?*

Treatment is intended to replace the thyroid hormone that is not being made by the thyroid. There are several formulations of thyroid hormone available, and your doctor will determine which is right for you. Once a change in medication is made, your thyroid hormone levels will

need to be checked in 1-2 months to determine if the dose is correct for you. Thyroid hormone should be taken on an empty stomach, with no other medications or supplements.

*I have hypothyroidism. Can I become pregnant?*

Some patients with hypothyroidism may have difficulty becoming pregnant, particularly if they are not taking enough thyroid hormone. If your levels are controlled, hypothyroidism should not keep you from conceiving. Thyroid hormone is critical for fetal brain development, so it is very important to make sure your levels are normal before you become pregnant, and throughout pregnancy. Thyroid hormone doses often need to be increased during pregnancy, so your doctor will most likely recommend repeating your labs several times during pregnancy.