

Hyperthyroidism

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 too high (hyperthyroidism), another hormone called thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH), is usually low.

What is hyperthyroidism and what are the symptoms?

Hyperthyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland is producing too much thyroid hormone. Patients with hyperthyroidism usually have high thyroid hormone levels and low TSH.

Symptoms can include:

- Fatigue
- Anxiety/jitteriness
- Palpitations, or fast heart rate
- Tremor
- Feeling hot/sweaty much of the time
- Diarrhea or more frequent bowel movements
- Weight loss
- Irregular periods

How is hyperthyroidism 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 hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism can be caused by 3 main causes. The first is called Grave's disease, a disorder in which the body produces antibodies that stimulate the thyroid to produce too much thyroid hormone. Patients with Grave's disease may also have eye abnormalities, such as bulging eyes. Another common cause of hyperthyroidism is thyroiditis, or thyroid inflammation, which can occur after or during pregnancy, or in patients who have Hashimoto's thyroiditis, a common condition in which patients develop antibodies against their thyroid that cause inflammation and destruction of the thyroid gland.

How is hyperthyroidism treated?

Hyperthyroidism is often treated with medication. Sometimes, a more permanent treatment is needed, and radioactive iodine treatment is used to control severe hyperthyroidism. In some cases, surgery is used to remove the thyroid gland.

I have hyperthyroidism. Can I become pregnant?

Some patients with hyperthyroidism may have difficulty becoming pregnant, particularly if the disease is not well-controlled. Thyroid hormone is critical for fetal brain development, so it is very important to make sure your levels are controlled before you become pregnant, and throughout pregnancy. Your medication dosage may need to be changed during pregnancy, so your doctor will want to check your hormone levels frequently. You should not become pregnant if you have received radioactive iodine ablation within the last 6 months.