

DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Thyroid Disease

Because the thyroid affects so many of the body's vital functions, it's important to understand how thyroid disease can affect your life so you can take control of reducing its symptoms. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

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| Goiter | An enlargement of the thyroid gland. A goiter usually indicates the presence of thyroid disease, and should always lead to a full medical evaluation. |
| Hyperthyroidism | A serious disorder in which the thyroid gland produces too much thyroid hormone. It can produce many symptoms including rapid heart rate, weight loss, excessive sweating, menstrual changes, fatigue, sleeping disorders, and tremor. This condition is potentially life-threatening and always needs to be treated. |
| Hypothyroidism | A serious disorder in which the thyroid gland produces too little thyroid hormone. Common symptoms include weight gain, weakness and fatigue, constipation, dry skin, thinning hair, diffuse pain, and slow heart rate. |
| Graves' Disease | An autoimmune disorder that causes hyperthyroidism by making the thyroid gland produce too much thyroid hormone. Graves' disease can also cause other problems, including eye problems and skin changes. |
| T3 and T4 | The two major forms of thyroid hormone. Most of the hormone made by the thyroid gland is T4, but T3 is the more active form. Blood levels of T3 and T4 are helpful in determining whether hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism are present, and also in determining whether treatment for thyroid disease is adequate. |
| Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) | A hormone that causes the thyroid gland to produce more thyroid hormone, and is itself released by the pituitary gland (located in the brain), in response to lower levels of T3 and T4 circulating in the blood. |
| Subclinical Hypothyroidism | A form of mild failure of the thyroid gland. In this condition the TSH level is elevated, but the thyroid hormone levels remain normal. Whether this condition needs to be treated is still controversial, but many experts do treat it—especially if symptoms compatible with hypothyroidism are present. |
| Thyroid nodule | A discrete lump that forms within the thyroid gland. Several conditions can cause a thyroid nodule, many of which are benign. However, because thyroid cancer can also produce a nodule, thyroid nodules always need to be evaluated. |
| Thyroiditis | An inflammation of the thyroid gland. There are several types of thyroiditis, but the most common type is called Hashimoto's thyroiditis, which is by far the leading cause of hypothyroidism. |

Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage thyroid disease.

About Symptoms

- I have symptoms that I think may indicate hyperthyroidism (or hypothyroidism). Have you checked my TSH level to see whether I have this condition?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- Is my hyperthyroidism caused by Graves' disease, an overactive thyroid nodule, thyroiditis, or some other problem?
- Is my hypothyroidism caused by Hashimoto's thyroiditis, a pituitary disorder, or some other problem?
- Could the medications I'm taking be contributing to my thyroid problem?

About Diagnosis

- What tests will you do to pinpoint the exact cause of my hyperthyroidism (or hypothyroidism)?
- How will you evaluate my thyroid nodule?
- Now that you have diagnosed my thyroid condition and its cause, is this a lifelong problem, or is there a chance it is a temporary one?
- Should I see a thyroid specialist for another opinion on whether I may have this condition?

About Treatment

- In treating my hyperthyroidism, should we consider a course of anti-thyroid medication before using radioactive iodine therapy?
- What side effects should I watch out for with the medication you are prescribing?
- How are you going to monitor whether the treatment is working adequately?
- How long should it take for my symptoms of hyperthyroidism (or hypothyroidism) to go away once treatment has begun?
- Would you ever consider adding T3 medication to my treatment?
