

Thyroid disorders: Top Ten Facts



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Thyroid disorders:

Top Ten Facts



1. Up to 300 million people worldwide experience problems with their thyroid,¹ although over half are presumed to be unaware of their condition.²
2. The thyroid gland is a small organ with a huge impact. The gland makes, stores, and releases thyroid hormones into the blood, thus regulating metabolism. These hormones are essential for the proper functioning of all bodily tissues and organs.³
3. There are two functional disorders of the thyroid: **hypothyroidism** (underactive thyroid) and **hyperthyroidism** (overactive thyroid), of which hypothyroidism is much more common.⁴
4. Symptoms of thyroid disorders vary from person to person, but can commonly be mistaken for being caused by other conditions like pregnancy, the menopause or depression.³
5. Patients with hypothyroidism often experience fatigue, drowsiness and/or weakness, cold intolerance, impaired memory, weight gain or increased difficulty losing weight (despite sensible diet and exercise), depression, constipation, abnormal menstrual periods and/or fertility problems, joint or muscle pain and thin/brittle hair or fingernails and/or dry flaky skin.^{3, 5, 6, 7}
6. Long-term complications of hypothyroidism can be serious and include a heart rate so slow that it can cause patients to slip into a coma, higher diastolic blood pressure and elevated cholesterol levels – significant risk factors for arteriosclerosis and heart disease, infertility and Alzheimer's disease (increased risk in females).^{5, 6, 8, 9}
7. Patients with hyperthyroidism may experience weight loss even when eating normally, anxiety and irritability, a very fast heart rate (often more than 100 beats per minute), prominent, staring eyes, trembling hands, weakness, hair loss, frequent bowel movements, fast growing fingernails, thin and very smooth skin, sweating more than usual and abnormal menstrual periods.^{10, 11}
8. Untreated hyperthyroidism may lead to cardiac arrhythmia (an irregular rate of muscle contractions in the heart) through to heart attacks.⁸ Additionally, in postmenopausal women, hyperthyroidism increases the risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures.¹⁰ Hyperthyroidism in pregnancy is very serious and can lead to miscarriage, poor growth of the baby in the womb, premature labour and delivery,¹² and thyroid storm (a dangerous rise in hormone levels).²
9. Despite the symptoms of thyroid dysfunction being so varied and sometimes misleading, the condition can easily be diagnosed with a simple blood test to check the level of thyroid hormone in your blood.³ A physical examination may also be performed to look for typical signs to support the correct diagnosis.⁵
10. Effective treatment for both hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism is available. For more information speak to your family doctor or visit www.thyroidweek.com.