

Thyroid Awareness

January is Thyroid Awareness Month. The [American Thyroid Association \(ATA\)](#) is the world's leading professional association of medical specialists dedicated to education and research to improve thyroid disease prevention, diagnosis and treatment; improving thyroid patient care; and educating the public about thyroid health and diseases.

Stats & Impact

An estimated 20 million Americans have a thyroid condition and up to 60 percent are not even aware. The thyroid can be either overactive or underactive—and both conditions can lead to severe health challenges.

- More than 12 percent of the U.S. population will develop a thyroid condition during their lifetime.
- Women are five to eight times more likely than men to have thyroid problems.
- One woman in eight will develop a thyroid disorder during her lifetime.
- Most thyroid cancers respond to treatment, although a small percentage can be very aggressive.
- The causes of thyroid problems are largely unknown.
- Undiagnosed thyroid disease may put patients at risk for certain serious conditions, such as cardiovascular diseases, osteoporosis and infertility.
- Pregnant women with undiagnosed or inadequately treated hypothyroidism have an increased risk of miscarriage, preterm delivery, and severe developmental problems in their children.
- Most thyroid diseases are life-long conditions that can be managed with medical attention.



Facts About Thyroid Conditions

The thyroid is a hormone-producing gland that regulates the body's metabolism—the rate at which the body produces energy from nutrients and oxygen—and affects critical body functions, such as energy level and heart rate.

- The thyroid gland is located in the middle of the lower neck.
- Although the thyroid gland is relatively small, it produces a hormone that influences every cell, tissue and organ in the body.

- *Hypothyroidism* is a condition where the thyroid gland does not produce enough thyroid hormone. Symptoms include extreme fatigue, depression, forgetfulness, and some weight gain.
- Hyperthyroidism, another form of thyroid disease, is a condition causing the gland to produce too much thyroid hormone. Symptoms include irritability, nervousness, muscle weakness, unexplained weight loss, sleep disturbances, vision problems and eye irritation.
- Graves' disease is a type of hyperthyroidism; it is an autoimmune disorder that is genetic and estimated to affect one percent of the population.

Diagnosis & Treatment

Your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms. You will also have a physical exam. If your doctor thinks you have hypothyroidism, a simple blood test can show if your thyroid hormone level is too low.

Doctors usually prescribe pills to treat hypothyroidism. Most people start to feel better in a week or two. Your symptoms will probably go away within a few months. But you will likely need to keep taking the pills from now on.

It's important to take your medicine just the way your doctor tells you to. You will also need to see your doctor for follow-up visits to make sure you have the right dose. Getting too much or too little thyroid hormone can cause problems.

If you have mild hypothyroidism, you may not need treatment now. But you'll want to watch for signs that it is getting worse.

Additional Resources

- [Cigna](#) members
- [Kaiser Permanente](#) members
- [The American Thyroid Association](#)
- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Office of Human Resources Management
Level Up – Employee Wellness Program
1400 McCormick Drive, Suite 245
Largo, MD 20774
LevelUp@co.pg.md.us

