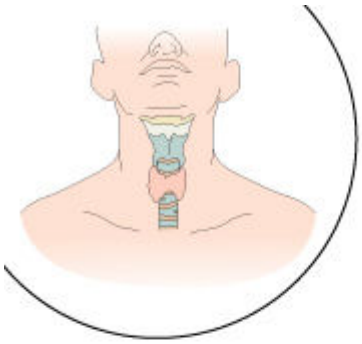
Hypothyroidism

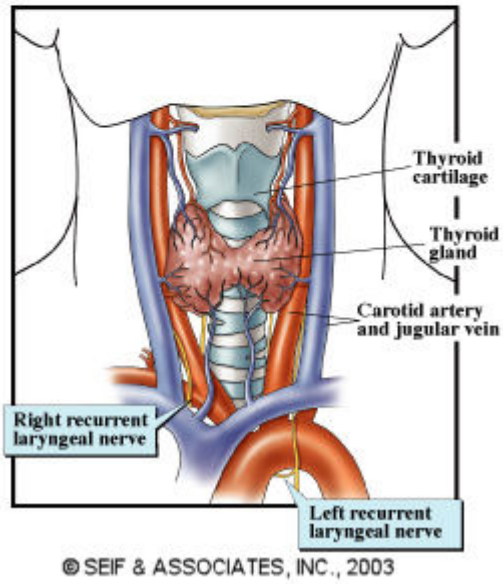
The *thyroid* is a large gland located in the lower front of your neck. The thyroid gland helps control metabolism. Metabolism is how your body handles food. It controls metabolism with the *hormone* thyroxine. When this gland is *underactive* (hypothyroid), it produces too little hormone.



SYMPTOMS OF HYPOTHYROIDISM

- Lethargy (feeling as though you have no energy)
- Cold intolerance
- Weight gain (in spite of normal food intake)
- Dry skin
- Coarse hair
- Menstrual irregularity (if severe, may lead to infertility)
- Slowing of thought processes

Cardiac problems are also caused by insufficient amounts of thyroid hormone. Hypothyroidism in the newborn is cretinism, and is an extreme form. It is important that this form be treated adequately and immediately or it will lead rapidly to retarded physical and mental development.



CAUSES OF HYPOTHYROIDISM

These include:

- Absence or destruction of thyroid tissue.
- Goiter due to iodine deficiency.
- Goiter due to medications.
- Congenital defects (since birth).
- Problems with the pituitary. This causes a lack of TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone). This hormone tells the thyroid to turn out more hormone.

DIAGNOSIS

To prove hypothyroidism, your caregiver may do blood tests and ultrasound tests. Sometimes the signs are hidden. It may be necessary for your caregiver to watch this illness with blood tests either before or after diagnosis and treatment.

TREATMENT

Low levels of thyroid hormone are increased by using synthetic thyroid hormone. This is a safe, effective treatment. It usually takes about four weeks to gain the full effects of the medication. After you have the full effect of the medication, it will generally take another four weeks for problems to leave. Your caregiver may start you on low doses. If you have had heart problems the dose may be gradually increased. It is generally not an emergency to get rapidly to normal.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take your medications as your caregiver suggests. Let your caregiver know of any medications you are taking or start taking. Your caregiver will help you with dosage schedules.
- As your condition improves, your dosage needs may increase. It will be necessary to have continuing blood tests as suggested by your caregiver.
- Report all suspected medication side effects to your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Sweating.
- *Tremulousness* (tremors).
- Anxiety.
- Rapid weight loss.
- Heat intolerance.
- Emotional swings.
- Diarrhea.
- Weakness.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

You develop chest pain, an irregular heart beat (*palpitations*), or a rapid heart beat.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 12/18/2006 Document Re-Released: 11/30/2009

ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.