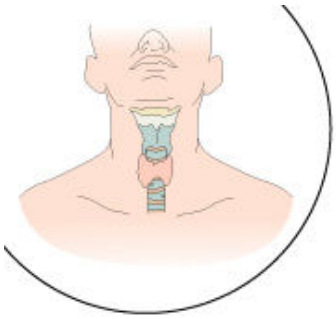
Hyperthyroidism
(Overactive Thyroid, Thyrotoxosis)

The thyroid is a large gland located in the lower front part of your neck. The thyroid helps control metabolism. Metabolism is how your body uses food. It controls metabolism with the *hormone* thyroxine. When the thyroid is overactive, it produces too much hormone. When this happens, these following problems may occur:

- Nervousness
- Heat intolerance
- Weight loss (in spite of increase food intake)
- Diarrhea
- Change in hair or skin texture
- *Palpitations* (heart skipping or having extra beats)
- T*achycardia* (rapid heart rate)
- Loss of menstruation (*amenorrhea*)
- Shaking of the hands

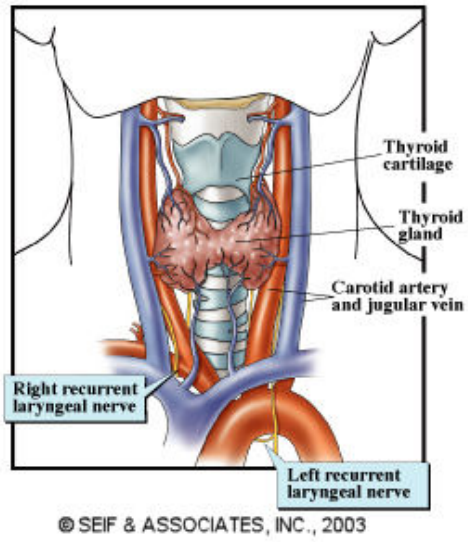


CAUSES OF HYPERTHYROIDISM

- Grave's Disease (the immune system attacks the thyroid gland). This is the most common cause.
- Inflammation of the thyroid gland.
- Tumor (usually benign) in the thyroid gland or elsewhere.
- Excessive use of thyroid medications (both prescription and 'natural'.
- Excessive ingestion of Iodine.

DIAGNOSIS

To prove hyperthyroidism, 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.



SHORT TERM TREATMENT

There are several treatments to control symptoms. Drugs called beta blockers may give some relief. Drugs that decrease hormone production will provide temporary relief in many people. These measures will usually not give permanent relief.

DEFINITIVE THERAPY

There are treatments available which can be discussed between you and your caregiver which will permanently treat the problem. These treatments range from surgery (removal of the thyroid), to the use of radioactive iodine (destroys the thyroid by radiation), to the use of antithyroid drugs (interfere with hormone synthesis). The first two treatments are permanent and usually successful. They most often require hormone replacement therapy for life. This is because it is impossible to remove or destroy the exact amount of thyroid required to make a person *euthyroid* (normal).

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

See your caregiver if the problems you are being treated for get worse. Examples of this would be the problems listed above.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF YOUR GENERAL CONDITION WORSENS.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.

- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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