

Hypothyroidism (Underactive Thyroid)



What Is Hypothyroidism?

The thyroid is a small gland in the neck. It makes hormones that control how the body uses energy. Hypothyroidism, or underactive thyroid, is when the thyroid gland is not working and making enough hormones. There can be many different causes, including:

- Hashimoto's disease
- Radiation therapy to treat cancers of the head and neck
- Treatment for an overactive thyroid
- Surgery to remove the thyroid gland



What Are the Warning Signs of Hypothyroidism?

- Feeling tired and sleepy all the time
- Feeling cold all the time
- Weight gain
- Difficulty having a bowel movement (constipation)
- Dry skin
- Depression



How Is Hypothyroidism Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you.
- A blood test may be given to check your thyroid hormone levels and for signs of Hashimoto's disease.



How Is Hypothyroidism Treated?

- Treatment includes medicines to replace thyroid hormones and bring them to the normal range.
- Symptoms usually get better within a few weeks of starting medicines.
- You may need to take medicines to replace thyroid hormones for the rest of your life.

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Questions for My Doctor

- If I don't take medicines, what will happen?
- Will I need any more tests?
- Will I be able to lose the weight I gained?
- Are there any risks or side effects from the treatment?
- What can I expect once I start treatment?
- How often should I have thyroid testing?
- How long will I have to take the medicine?



Bottom Line

- Hypothyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland is not working and making enough hormones.
- Symptoms of hypothyroidism include: feeling tired, feeling cold, weight gain, and feeling depressed.
- Your doctor may use blood and other tests to diagnose underactive thyroid.
- Medicines to replace thyroid hormones may be prescribed. Once you start taking the right dose of a thyroid hormone replacement pill, you will usually feel better within a few weeks.

For More Information

- **MedlinePlus:** www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hypothyroidism.html
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases:** www.endocrine.niddk.nih.gov/pubs/hypothyroidism/Hypothyroidism_508.pdf
- **American Thyroid Association:** www.thyroid.org/patients/patient_brochures/hypothyroidism.html

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