

The thyroid gland is situated in the neck and can be seen or felt as the Adam's apple

What to look for

Hyperthyroidism:

- weight loss despite increased appetite.
- increased heart rate, higher blood pressure, and increased nervousness, with excessive perspiration.
- more frequent bowel movements, sometimes with diarrhoea.
- muscle weakness, trembling hands.
- development of a goitre.

Hypothyroidism:

- lethargy, slower mental processes.
- reduced heart rate.
- increased sensitivity to cold.
- tingling or numbness in the hands.
- development of a goitre.

Subacute thyroiditis:

- mild to severe pain in the thyroid gland.
- the thyroid feels tender to the touch.
- pain when swallowing or turning your head.
- appearance of these symptoms shortly after a viral infection, such as the flu, mumps, or measles.

If there are problems with the thyroid gland, (and it is very common), rest assured that usually it is easily cured. Most problems are mild however it is always wise to have any symptoms thoroughly checked out to rule out any other more serious illness. The thyroid produces hormones and because of this, it impacts upon all the metabolic processes within your body. The conditions most common are hyperthyroidism - too much hormone production. And hypothyroidism - insufficient hormone production.

Although the effects can be unpleasant or uncomfortable, most thyroid problems are not serious if properly diagnosed and treated.

Causes

Hyperthyroidism is the result of an overproduction of thyroid hormones. This condition can be brought on by Graves' disease, an autoimmune disorder or the development of toxic adenomas in the thyroid gland which all aid in the production of either too many or an imbalance of hormones.

Hypothyroidism results from an underproduction of thyroid hormones. Hypothyroidism can result when the thyroid gland has been surgically removed or destroyed by chemicals or if you are exposed to excessive amounts of iodide. It is vital that this condition be treated.

Although cancer of the thyroid gland is quite rare.

A doctor can diagnose hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism by looking at the levels of certain hormones in your blood.

Another ways of determining whether you have thyroid problems is to monitor your temperature. To track your basal temperature accurately, you must closely follow certain guidelines: Shake the thermometer below 35°C at night and place it near you so you do not have to move much to get it in the morning.

The next morning, before you get out of bed, take your temperature via your armpit for 10 minutes while staying as still as possible. Keep records of your temperature for at least 7 days. (Women should do this during the first two weeks of the menstrual cycle, as their basal temperature may rise during the latter half).

Normal body basal temperatures fall between 37.4° C and 37.8° C. If your basal temperature is consistently low, you could be mildly hypothyroid.

Your doctor may also check for thyroid cancer.

Traditional Treatment

For thyroid disorders stemming from the over or under production of thyroid hormones, the treatment is relatively simple and lasting.

Treating hyperthyroidism requires suppressing the manufacture of thyroid hormone, while hypothyroidism demands hormone replacement.

Lifestyle

Aerobic exercise for 15 to 20 minutes a day is excellent for maintaining good thyroid function.

Dietary Considerations

For hypothyroidism, avoid cabbage, peaches, soybeans, spinach, peanuts, and radishes, as these foods can interfere with the manufacture of thyroid hormones. Supplements of vitamin C, vitamin E, riboflavin (vitamin B2), zinc, niacin (vitamin B3), pyridoxine (vitamin B6), and tyrosine might help boost thyroid production.

However, if you have hyperthyroidism, eating the foods listed above might help lower your body's production of thyroid hormone.

Yoga - This form of exercise may help keep the thyroid in top condition

When to seek further professional advice

- you experience any of the symptoms above.