

THYROID HEALTH: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



What is a thyroid? And how do you know if yours is healthy?

The thyroid is small, butterfly-shaped gland located at the base of your neck, right under your larynx. This little gland has a big job – it is responsible for producing the hormones that control nearly every function in your body. It plays an important role in regulating your weight, body temperature, muscle strength, and even your mood.

If your thyroid isn't working properly, your body isn't working optimally. You may or may not notice, but it can be a big deal and lead to even bigger health issues.

Thyroid disorders include harmless goiters (a growth in the thyroid gland) to life-threatening cancer. The most common thyroid issues involve the production of too little -- or too much -- thyroid hormone.

Hypothyroidism is when your thyroid does not produce enough thyroid hormone, slowing down all of your body's functions, including your metabolism. This can lead to weight gain, lethargy, sensitivity to cold, hair loss and rough, dry skin.

Hyperthyroidism is when your thyroid is producing too much thyroid hormone, and your body's systems are pushed into overdrive. Symptoms of hyperthyroidism include difficulty concentrating, feeling restless, frequent bowel movements, and rapid or irregular heartbeat.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor. He or she may want to order a thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) blood test. TSH levels that are too high or too low can indicate that your thyroid isn't working properly. Further tests can help your doctor determine the cause of the problem. Treatment may include monitoring, medications or surgery.