



MERCY MEDICAL GROUP

Hypothyroidism

DESCRIPTION

The thyroid gland is at the base of the neck below the Adam's apple. This gland produces a hormone which controls metabolism, or the rate at which our organs function and burn calories. Hypothyroidism refers to the condition where the thyroid gland is underactive and does not make enough thyroid hormone.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Coarse, dry hair
- Constipation
- Decreased heart rate
- Decreased sexual interest
- Deep, hoarse voice
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Muscle weakness
- Poor tolerance to cold
- Thick, dry skin
- Unexplained weight gain.

DIAGNOSIS

Blood work can measure the amount of stimulation of the thyroid by the pituitary gland.

COMPLICATIONS IF NOT TREATED

- Mental confusion
- Depression
- Heart damage
- Infertility
- Coma (extreme cases).

CAUSES

- Thyroid gland wears out
- Family history of hypothyroidism
- Middle-aged and elderly women are most commonly affected
- Thyroiditis is thyroid failure due to attack on the thyroid gland by your body's immune system
- Viral or bacterial infections can cause hypothyroidism temporarily but usually do not result in permanent failure of the gland
- Pregnancy can cause the gland to be underactive for several months
- Diseases of the pituitary gland can cause hypothyroidism because the pituitary gland is the "master gland" of the body which tells the thyroid to make and release hormone
- Some people are born with an underactive thyroid gland (congenital).

TREATMENT

Once hypothyroidism is diagnosed, you will be prescribed synthetic hormone tablets. Usually symptoms improve within a week of hormone therapy and all symptoms should disappear within a few months. You will most likely need to take them every day for the rest of your life. After starting treatment, the doctor will periodically repeat the blood work to be sure the dosage of medicine is correct. There is no way to prevent hypothyroidism, but the treatment is simple and inexpensive.