

Thyroid Disease – Key Information¹:

About Your Thyroid:

The thyroid is a small gland located in the base of the neck, below the Adam's apple. Although relatively small, the thyroid gland helps regulate the function of many of the body's important organs, including the heart, brain, liver, kidneys and skin. Ensuring that the thyroid gland is healthy and functioning properly is important to an individual's overall well-being.

Hyperthyroidism²:

Hyperthyroidism occurs when the body is exposed to excessive amounts of thyroid hormone. This disorder occurs in almost one percent of all Americans. It affects women five to ten times more often than men. In its mildest form, hyperthyroidism may be asymptomatic. More often, however, the symptoms are discomforting, disabling, and sometimes life-threatening.

When hyperthyroidism develops, a goiter (enlargement of the thyroid) is usually present and may be associated with some or many of the following symptoms:

- Fast heart rate, often more than 100 beats per minute
- Feeling anxious, irritable, argumentative
- Trembling hands
- Weight loss, despite eating the same amount or even more than usual
- Intolerance of warm temperatures and increased likelihood to perspire
- Loss of scalp hair
- Tendency of fingernails to separate from the nail bed
- Muscle weakness, especially of the upper arms and thighs
- Loose and frequent bowel movements
- Smooth skin
- Change in menstrual pattern
- Increased likelihood for miscarriage
- Prominent "stare" of the eyes
- Protrusion of the eyes, with or without double vision (in patients with Graves' disease)
- Irregular heart rhythm, especially in patients older than 60 years of age
- Accelerated loss of calcium from bones, which increases the risk of osteoporosis and fractures

Hypothyroidism³:

An underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism) occurs when the gland produces less than the normal amount of thyroid hormone. The result is the "slowing down" of many bodily functions. Although sometimes temporary, hypothyroidism is usually a permanent condition. Of the nearly 30 million people estimated to be suffering from thyroid dysfunction, most have hypothyroidism.

In its earliest stage, hypothyroidism may be asymptomatic, since the body has the ability to partially compensate for a failing thyroid gland by increasing the stimulation to it. As thyroid hormone production decreases and the body's metabolism slows, a variety of symptoms may result:

- Fatigue
- Drowsiness
- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty with learning
- Dry, brittle hair and nails
- Dry, itchy skin
- Puffy face
- Constipation
- Sore muscles
- Weight gain and fluid retention
- Heavy and/or irregular menstrual flow
- Increased frequency of miscarriages
- Increased sensitivity to many medications

Thyroid Nodules⁴:

A thyroid nodule is a lump in or on the thyroid gland. Thyroid nodules are common, but are largely under-diagnosed. They are detected in about six percent of women and one to two percent of men. They are 10 times more common in older individuals than in younger ones. In some cases, several nodules will develop in the same person. Any time a lump is discovered in thyroid tissue, the possibility of cancer must be considered. Fortunately, the vast majority of thyroid nodules are not cancerous.

For more information on health services offered at Cone Health, visit www.conehealth.com or call (336) 832-7000.

Sources:

¹ EmPower Your Health, *Thyroid*, <http://www.empoweryourhealth.org/thyroid>

² EmPower Your Health, *Hyperthyroidism*, <http://www.empoweryourhealth.org/hyperthyroidism>

³ EmPower Your Health, *Hypothyroidism*, <http://www.empoweryourhealth.org/hyperthyroidism>

⁴ EmPower Your Health, *Thyroid Nodules*, <http://www.empoweryourhealth.org/thyroid-nodules>