

HYPOTHYROIDISM

Hypothyroidism is the term used to describe a shortage in thyroid hormone produced by the thyroid gland. Hypothyroidism may be caused by an autoimmune disease that damages the thyroid gland, radioactive iodine treatment or surgical removal of the thyroid due to hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid), a shortage of dietary iodine, failure of the pituitary gland to stimulate the thyroid (low TSH), and some medications including lithium and beta-blockers. You have a greater risk of developing hypothyroidism with increased age (over 60), obesity; having had neck, head, or chest radiation therapy; having had thyroid surgery; or with a family history of hypothyroidism.

Symptoms *may include:*

- Intolerance to cold
- Decreased sweating
- Constipation
- Coarse hair growth and dry skin
- Weight gain
- Sleepiness
- Fluid retention
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression
- Slow irregular heartbeat
- Dull facial expressions and slow speech
- Numbness and tingling of the hands and feet
- Anemia
- Decreased libido (sex drive)
- Menstrual irregularities in women

What your doctor can do:

- Diagnose hypothyroidism by asking about your symptoms, doing a physical exam, and laboratory blood tests.
- Prescribe thyroid hormone replacement medication.
- Do follow up evaluation, including repeat blood testing.

What you can do:

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Follow up with your doctor as directed; blood testing to measure thyroid function at regular intervals is important.

Contact your doctor if your symptoms fail to improve within 3 weeks after beginning treatment, or if new unexplained symptoms develop.