



# Could Your Thyroid Be Causing Unexplained Symptoms?

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The thyroid works quietly behind the scenes making hormones that control the body's metabolism. Most people wouldn't have a reason to give it a second thought. However, thyroid diseases can cause a broad range of symptoms and health problems. Often these are common symptoms that may be brushed off, but if you're noticing symptoms that won't go away, considering talking to your doctor about the thyroid.

## What Is the Thyroid?

The thyroid is one of many hormone-producing glands in your body. It sits at the base of the neck, narrow in the middle and wider on both sides, a little like a butterfly. It produces the hormones known as T3 and T4. These manage how your body uses energy. Because this is such a fundamental function, it can impact many different body systems, including body temperature, heart rate, digestion, energy and even mood.<sup>1</sup>

However, the thyroid must produce the right amount of these hormones to keep your body healthy. If thyroid function changes, it may produce too much or too little hormone. In a sense, that can cause your body to function too rapidly or slowly causing a variety of symptoms and complications.

## What If the Thyroid Is Overactive?

Hyperthyroidism, or an overactive thyroid, occurs when the thyroid produces too much hormone. This tells your body processes to speed up and use more energy. Symptoms include unexpected weight loss, fast or irregular heartbeat, increased hunger, anxiety, unusual sweating and more.

An overactive thyroid is most commonly caused by the autoimmune disorder Graves' disease. This disease causes the body's immune system to attack the thyroid, which in turn causes the thyroid to overproduce hormones. The only clear risk factor is family history of similar conditions.

An overactive thyroid can be treated with medication that slows thyroid activity. With this treatment, symptoms start to improve in several weeks or months.<sup>2</sup>

## What If the Thyroid Is Underactive?

An underactive thyroid, or hypothyroidism, is more common than overactive thyroid, occurring in nearly 1 in 20 Americans.<sup>3</sup> In this case, the thyroid doesn't make enough hormone, seemingly slowing the body down. This can be seen in the common symptoms, including unexplained tiredness, weight gain, slowed heart rate, depression and others. In many ways, these symptoms are opposite those of the overactive thyroid.

However, underactive thyroid can cause no symptoms at all, or symptoms can be slow to develop, appearing gradually. Often, these symptoms are ignored as signs of aging or other conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> [Cleveland Clinic](#), "Thyroid Disease"

<sup>2</sup> [Mayo Clinic](#), "Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid)"

<sup>3</sup> [NIH News in Health](#), "Thinking About Your Thyroid"

Hypothyroidism is most commonly caused by an autoimmune disorder. This is called Hashimoto's disease, and in this case, the immune system's attacks on the thyroid reduces its ability to produce hormone.

Common risk factors for underactive thyroid include a family history of thyroid disease or having other autoimmune diseases, like type 1 diabetes or celiac disease. It also more commonly occurs in women.

Underactive thyroid is more easily treatable than an overactive thyroid because hormone levels can be increased through medication. Once the right dose is identified, symptoms may start to improve in only a couple weeks. However, it requires lifelong treatment to maintain healthy hormone levels.<sup>4</sup>

### **When to Ask Your Doctor About Thyroid Diseases?**

Many of the symptoms associated with thyroid disease are common and also associated with other conditions. This can make thyroid disease initially difficult to identify. Symptoms may not be related to the thyroid at all, but if other potential causes have been eliminated, a thyroid condition should be considered.

Once suspected, tests can confirm or rule out a thyroid disease diagnosis. Depending on your symptoms and medical history, your doctor may prescribe one of several thyroid tests, including scans and blood work. This will provide more information, point to an overactive or underactive thyroid and indicate proper treatment options.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [Mayo Clinic](#), "Hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid)"

<sup>5</sup> [Cleveland Clinic](#), "Thyroid Disease"