



Thyroid Health

The thyroid is a small, butterfly-shaped gland located in the neck, but its hormones influence many functions throughout the body. Thyroid hormones help regulate metabolism, energy use, heart rate, body temperature and several other physiological processes.

When the thyroid produces too little or too much hormone, these functions can be affected.

Understanding an Underactive Thyroid

Hypothyroidism occurs when the thyroid does not produce enough thyroid hormone. It may be associated with fatigue, increased sensitivity to cold, constipation, dry skin, menstrual changes and weight gain.

One of the most common causes is Hashimoto's thyroiditis, an autoimmune condition in which the immune system gradually affects the thyroid gland.

Understanding an Overactive Thyroid

Hyperthyroidism occurs when the body is exposed to excessive thyroid hormone. Symptoms may include palpitations, tremors, increased sweating, heat intolerance, anxiety and unexplained weight loss.

Graves' disease, another autoimmune condition, is a common cause, although thyroid nodules and other conditions can also lead to excess thyroid hormone.

Recognising Thyroid Symptoms

Many symptoms associated with thyroid disease—such as fatigue, changes in weight, hair fall, mood changes or menstrual irregularities—are not specific to the thyroid and can occur for many other reasons.

Similarly, a mildly abnormal thyroid blood test does not always explain every symptom a person is experiencing.

This is why thyroid symptoms and laboratory results need to be interpreted in the appropriate clinical context.

The Connection Between Thyroid Function and Metabolism

Because thyroid hormones influence energy expenditure, thyroid dysfunction can affect body weight and metabolism.

However, thyroid problems are not responsible for every unexplained weight change. Treating genuine hypothyroidism restores thyroid hormone levels, but it may not lead to substantial weight loss if other factors are contributing to excess weight.

Conversely, unexplained weight loss can occur with an overactive thyroid but may have several other causes as well.



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Common Thyroid Misconceptions

“Weight gain means I must have a thyroid problem.”

Weight gain has many possible causes. Thyroid dysfunction is only one of them.

“An abnormal TSH always means I need treatment.”

Not necessarily. The degree of abnormality, thyroid hormone levels, symptoms, age, pregnancy status and other clinical factors can influence its significance.

“Once thyroid medicine is started, it can never be stopped.”

This depends on the underlying cause. Some thyroid conditions require lifelong treatment, while others may be temporary.



Dr. Samiksha Singh