



WomensHealth.gov

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

# Hashimoto's Thyroiditis

**Q: What is Hashimoto's Thyroiditis?**

**A:** Hashimoto's Thyroiditis is a type of autoimmune thyroid disease in which the immune system attacks and destroys the thyroid gland. The thyroid helps set the rate of metabolism, which is the rate at which the body uses energy. Hashimoto's stops the gland from making enough thyroid hormones for the body to work the way it should. It is the most common thyroid disease in the U.S.

**Q: What is an autoimmune disease?**

**A:** An autoimmune disease occurs when the body's immune system becomes misdirected and attacks the organs, cells or tissues that it was designed to protect. About 75% of autoimmune diseases occur in women, most often during their childbearing years.

**Q: What are the symptoms of Hashimoto's Thyroiditis?**

**A:** Some patients with Hashimoto's Thyroiditis may have no symptoms. However, the common symptoms are fatigue, depression, sensitivity to cold, weight gain, forgetfulness, muscle weakness, puffy face, dry skin and hair, constipation, muscle cramps, and increased menstrual flow. Some patients have major swelling of the thyroid gland in the front of the neck, called goiter.

**Q: Does this disease run in families?**

**A:** There is some evidence that Hashimoto's Thyroiditis can have a hereditary link. If autoimmune diseases in general run in your family, you are at a higher risk of developing one yourself.

**Q: How can I know for sure if I have this disease?**

**A:** Your doctor will perform a simple blood test that will be able to tell if your body has the right amount of thyroid hormones. This test measures the TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) to find out if the levels are in the normal range. The range is set by your doctor and should be discussed with you. Work with your doctor to figure out what level is right for you. There are other available tests that your doctor may choose to do if need be, such as a blood test to measure the level of "active thyroid hormone" or Free T4 and a scan (picture) to look at the thyroid.

**Q: What is the treatment for this disease?**

**A:** Hypothyroidism caused by Hashimoto's Thyroiditis is treated with thyroid hormone replacement. A small pill taken once a day should be able to keep the thyroid hormone levels normal. This medicine will, in most cases, need to be taken for the rest of the patient's life. When trying to figure out the amount of hormone you need, you may have to return to your doctor several times for blood tests to guide adjustments in the medicine dose. It is important that the dose be right for you. A yearly visit to your doctor will



WomensHealth.gov

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

help keep your levels normal and help you stay healthy overall. Be aware of the symptoms. If you note any changes or the return of symptoms, return to your doctor to see if you need to have your medicine dosage adjusted.

**Q: What would happen without medication to regulate my thyroid function?**

**A:** If left untreated, hypothyroidism can cause further problems, including changes in menstrual cycles, prevention of ovulation, and an increased risk of miscarriage. Symptoms such as fatigue, depression and constipation, may progress and there can be other serious consequences, including heart failure. It is also important to know that too much thyroid replacement hormone can mimic the symptoms of

hyperthyroidism. This is a condition that happens when there is too much thyroid hormone. These symptoms include insomnia, irritability, weight loss without dieting, heat sensitivity, increased perspiration, thinning of your skin, fine or brittle hair, muscular weakness, eye changes, lighter menstrual flow, rapid heart beat and shaky hands.

**Q: What happens if I have this disease and I get pregnant?**

**A:** It is important to get checked out by your doctor more often if you are pregnant. Inadequately treated thyroid problems can affect a growing baby, and the thyroid replacement needs of pregnant women often change. A doctor can help you figure out your changing medicine needs. ■

### *For More Information . . .*

You can find out more information about Hashimoto's Thyroiditis and hypothyroidism by contacting the womenshealth.gov Call Center at 1-800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

**National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive Diseases and Kidney Diseases**

Phone: (301) 496-3583  
Internet Address:  
<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/>

**The American Thyroid Association**

Email: [admin@thyroid.org](mailto:admin@thyroid.org)  
Internet Address: <http://www.thyroid.org>

All material contained in this FAQ is free of copyright restrictions, and may be copied, reproduced, or duplicated without permission of the Office on Women's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services. Citation of the source is appreciated.

**This FAQ was reviewed by:**

Dr. David Cooper,  
Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, Division of Endocrinology.