

# Diagnosis: Hyperthyroidism

## What is it?

Also known as overactive thyroid, hyperthyroidism occurs when your thyroid gland produces too much of the hormone thyroxine. It can be caused by Graves' disease, Plummer's disease, and thyroiditis.

## Symptoms

Rapid or irregular heartbeat, heart pounding, increased appetite, nervousness, anxiety and irritability, hand tremors, sweating, changed menstrual patterns, enlarged thyroid (which can look like swelling at the base of your neck (sometimes called a goiter), sleep disturbance, heat sensitivity, more frequent bowel movements, skin thinning, fine/brittle hair, and unintentional weight loss, even with steady or increased appetite.

## Health Impacts

Untreated hyperthyroidism can lead to complications including heart problems, eye issues, red and swollen skin, brittle bones, and thyrotoxic crisis.

## Weight Stigma in Treatment

Even when higher weight patients complain to their healthcare practitioner about unexplained weight loss, the practitioner can see it as a positive thing and fail to investigate the cause.

## Diagnosis

Hyperthyroidism is diagnosed based on symptoms as well as blood tests that measure thyroxine and thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH). High thyroxine and low or no TSH indicates an overactive thyroid.

If your blood tests show hyperthyroidism, additional tests including a radioiodine uptake test and thyroid scan and ultrasound may be recommended to determine the root cause.

## Treatment Options

There are a number of treatments available, you'll want to speak with your healthcare practitioner to see what is best for you based on the severity of your hyperthyroidism as well as your age, physical condition, and personal preferences.

Higher weight patients should take care to make sure that their healthcare practitioner is focusing on treating their actual symptoms and hormone levels rather than focusing on their weight.

Treatment options include:

**Anti-thyroid medications.** These are medications that prevent your thyroid gland from producing excess hormones. Symptoms usually begin to improve within several weeks to months, but treatment with anti-thyroid medications typically continues at least a year and often longer. These drugs carry a risk of liver damage, which can be life-threatening, as well as decreasing immunity and causing allergic reactions in some people including fever, hives, rashes, and joint pain.

**Radioactive iodine.** This is an oral medication that causes your thyroid to shrink and typically solves symptoms within a few months. This treatment can cause underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism) which may then require lifelong treatment.

**Beta blockers.** These medications don't treat hyperthyroidism directly, but can ease symptoms including tremors, rapid heart rate, and palpitations. They may be prescribed while other treatments are given for the thyroid itself.

**Surgery (thyroidectomy).** This is an uncommon treatment, but if the other options don't work for you, you may consider this surgery which removes most of your thyroid gland. The surgery carries risks of parathyroid gland and vocal cord damage and will cause hypothyroidism which will require lifelong treatment.