

Hashimoto's Thyroiditis

FAQ

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(Lymphocytic Thyroiditis)

WHAT IS THE THYROID GLAND?

The thyroid gland located in the neck produces thyroid hormones which help the body use energy, stay warm and keep the brain, heart, muscles, and other organs working normally.

1 CAUSES

Hashimoto's thyroiditis is an autoimmune disorder in which the immune cells of the body are activated against the thyroid gland leading to chronic inflammation. Antibodies to the thyroid gland usually occur as part of this process and can be used as markers of this condition. It is not known why some people make antibodies, although this condition tends to run in families. Hashimoto's thyroiditis occurs most commonly in middle aged women, but can be seen at any age, and can also affect men and children.

2 SYMPTOMS

There are no direct symptoms from having antibodies against the thyroid. Over time, chronic thyroid inflammation can cause gradual thyroid failure and the development of hypothyroidism, which can have symptoms include fatigue, weight gain, constipation, increased sensitivity to cold, dry skin, depression, muscle aches and reduced exercise tolerance, and irregular or heavy menstrual periods. In some cases, the inflammation causes the thyroid to become enlarged (goiter), which rarely may cause neck discomfort or difficulty swallowing.

3 DIAGNOSIS

Blood tests can be ordered to measure antibodies against thyroperoxidase (TPO), a protein found within the thyroid. Hashimoto's may also be found if thyroid ultrasound is performed, and the images show the classic appearance of chronic inflammation.

4 TREATMENT

Patients with elevated antibodies but normal thyroid function tests do not require treatment, but should have their thyroid function tests measured periodically because they may develop hypothyroidism or other thyroid problems. When hypothyroidism occurs, it is treated with synthetic thyroid hormone, called levothyroxine. (See [Hypothyroidism brochure](#))



FURTHER READING

Further details on this and other thyroid-related topics are available in the patient information section on the American Thyroid Association® website at www.thyroid.org.

