

# Thyroid cancer



You've just learned that you have thyroid cancer. Here is some information to help you understand the disease and treatments you may have.

## What is the thyroid?

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland in the front of the neck. If it's swollen or there is a cancerous mass, the doctor can generally feel it by palpating the neck.

## What does the thyroid do?

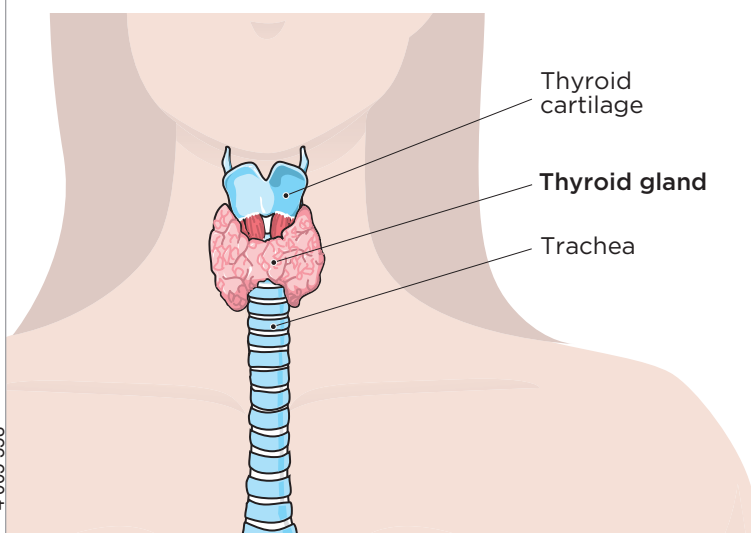
The thyroid's main role is to produce the hormones (T4 and T3) that allow the body to function normally. The thyroid itself is controlled by a hormone called TSH (short for thyroid-stimulating hormone), which is secreted by the pituitary gland, which is attached to the base of the brain.

## What are the effects of the hormones produced by the thyroid?

The hormones produced by the thyroid affect the whole body. Among other things, they play a role in:

- heart function
- maintaining good digestion
- kidney function
- body temperature
- healthy skin
- bone growth and development
- muscle development and function
- brain function

### Position of the thyroid



## What is thyroid cancer?

Thyroid cancer occurs when healthy cells become cancerous. They multiply abnormally quickly and in a disorganized manner. This causes the appearance of a mass called a "tumour."

There are several types of thyroid cancer (papillary and variants, follicular, Hurthle, medullar, poorly differentiated and anaplastic).

## Who is most likely to be affected by thyroid cancer?

Thyroid cancer strikes women more often than men. Most people affected by the disease are between the ages of 25 and 65.

## Is thyroid cancer easily treatable?

Treatments for thyroid cancer are generally effective. The long-term survival rate is over 90%.

## What are the signs and symptoms of thyroid cancer?

People with thyroid cancer often have no symptoms. However, some symptoms may appear. **Attention: other diseases can cause the same symptoms.**

The following symptoms should be evaluated by a doctor:

- lump on the front of the neck
- hoarse voice
- trouble swallowing
- trouble breathing



## Why do I have thyroid cancer?

Most of the time, thyroid cancer appears without a known cause. However, certain factors do increase the risk of having the disease:

- exposure to radiation in the neck region
- family members who have had thyroid cancer in the past

## How is thyroid cancer treated?

Specialists will discuss your situation to find the most effective treatment. The choice will depend, among other things, on the characteristics of the cancer, where it is located and how large it is. Your age and general state of health, your opinion and your concerns will also be taken into account.

Your treatment will be personalized. It may be a combination of several types of treatments.

Here are the most common treatments.

**Surgery:** normally, this would mean removing the entire thyroid gland.



**Hormone therapy:** if the thyroid is removed, you will need to take hormones to replace the hormones the thyroid was producing. This will also slow the growth of cancer cells if there are any remaining after surgery.

**Radioactive iodine treatment:** this product destroys all the cancer cells in the thyroid, and also some normal cells.

**Radiation therapy:** treatment with X-rays directed at the tumour to destroy the cancer cells.

**Chemotherapy:** medication injected into your veins or given orally to destroy the cancer cells.

## What follow-up treatment will I receive?

Regular long-term follow-up plays an important role in the treatment of thyroid cancer. You will need to have various tests so that the care team can adapt your treatments to meet your needs.

Here are the main tests.

- a physical examination during which the doctor examines your neck.
- blood tests to monitor your hormone levels (T3, T4 and TSH). These tests also measure the levels of 2 proteins, thyroglobulin (Tg) and calcitonin, which can indicate a return of the cancer.
- various imaging tests that let the doctors see the tumour. For example, a scan or ultrasound.



You may need to have further tests, based on your individual case.

## What signs or symptoms should I watch out for?

If you notice a lump on your neck or your symptoms grow worse, contact your doctor.

## Who should I ask for help or answers to my questions?

If you have questions, feel free to contact your pivot nurse or your doctor.



### USEFUL RESOURCES

Thyroid Cancer Canada:

> **514 312-2390**

> **thyroidcancercanada.org**

Canadian Cancer Society:

> **1 888 939-3333**

> **cancer.ca**

American Thyroid Association:

> **thyroid.org**

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site

**chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante**



### Questions


*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

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