

Hashimoto's Thyroiditis: What You Need to Know

Hashimoto's thyroiditis is an autoimmune disease that affects the thyroid. In this handout, you will learn about the symptoms and signs of Hashimoto's thyroiditis. You will also learn how doctors test for and treat the disease.

WHAT IS HASHIMOTO'S THYROIDITIS?

Hashimoto's thyroiditis is an **autoimmune disease** (a disease involving the immune system) in which the body's immune system attacks and destroys the **thyroid gland** (a small butterfly-shaped gland in the front of the neck). When this happens, the thyroid gland cannot make **thyroid hormone** as well as it should. The body needs thyroid hormone for normal **metabolism**.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS OF HASHIMOTO'S THYROIDITIS?

- Poor growth in children
- Fatigue (tiredness)
- Constipation
- Weight gain
- Sensitivity to cold temperatures
- Dry, rough skin and hair
- Unusual hair loss
- Hoarse voice
- Irregular or heavy periods (in girls)
- Slow heart rate
- Large thyroid gland (goiter)
- Dull reflexes

HOW DO DOCTORS TEST FOR HYPOTHYROIDISM?

The doctor will go over your child's medical history and do a physical exam. Your child will also have a blood test to measure the following:

- The amount of thyroid hormone (made by the thyroid gland) and **thyroid stimulating hormone** (or TSH, made by the **pituitary gland**) in the blood
- Certain **antibodies** to the thyroid gland that help diagnose autoimmune hypothyroidism

HOW DO DOCTORS TREAT HASHIMOTO'S THYROIDITIS?

Treatment depends on your child's symptoms. In very mild cases, your child might not need treatment.

The most common treatment is a pill called **levothyroxine**. This medication is the synthetic thyroid hormone. It replaces the thyroid hormone that your child's thyroid gland is not making. The doctor will tell you how and when your child should take the pill.

After starting levothyroxine, the doctor will check your child's thyroid hormone levels at regular intervals. How often the doctor checks is based on your child's age and whether he is still growing.

WHAT IS THE OUTCOME FOR HYPOTHYROIDISM?

Your child should live a healthy, normal life if he receives levothyroxine replacement and takes this correctly.

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