

Hypothyroidism in Children: What You Need to Know

Hypothyroidism is a condition that affects the thyroid gland. In this handout, learn the cause and symptoms of hypothyroidism, and how doctors diagnose and treat the condition.

WHAT IS HYPOTHYROIDISM?

Hypothyroidism is a condition in which either the **thyroid gland** (a small butterfly-shaped gland in the front of your neck) does not make enough thyroid hormone, or the pituitary gland does not make enough **thyroid stimulating hormone**, or **TSH** (a hormone that tells the thyroid gland to make thyroid hormone). Your body uses thyroid hormone to regulate its metabolism.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HYPOTHYROIDISM?

Congenital hypothyroidism (CH) happens when a baby is born with a thyroid that is not fully developed, not developed at all, or unable to make thyroid hormone. CH can also happen when the **pituitary gland** (small gland in the brain that controls other glands in the body) does not make enough thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH).

Acquired hypothyroidism occurs later in life. Common causes include:

- Autoimmune hypothyroidism (AH), a condition in which the body's immune system attacks and destroys the thyroid gland to varying degrees. AH is also called Hashimoto's thyroiditis.
- Certain medications (such as lithium).
- Surgery or radiation involving the thyroid gland
- Secondary hypothyroidism, a condition in which the pituitary gland makes less of TSH.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HYPOTHYROIDISM?

- Poor growth in children
- Fatigue (tiredness) or weakness
- Constipation
- Weight gain
- Sensitivity to cold temperatures
- Dry and rough skin and hair
- Unusual hair loss
- Hoarse voice
- Irregular or heavy periods (in girls)
- Puffy, swollen or droopy eyelids
- 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 get a blood test to measure the amount of thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) and thyroid hormone in blood, and certain antibodies to the thyroid gland.

HOW DO DOCTORS TREAT HYPOTHYROIDISM?

The most common treatment is a medication called **levothyroxine**. This medication replaces the thyroid hormone that your child's body is not making. The doctor will do regular blood tests to make sure your child is getting the right dose of levothyroxine and adjust the dose accordingly.

WHAT IS THE OUTCOME OF HYPOTHYROIDISM?

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