



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Nodules (lumps) involving the thyroid gland located in the front of the neck. Most often, the nodules are benign. Less than 10% are malignant (cancerous). Nodules are common and can affect both sexes (women more than men) and all age groups.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Most nodules have no symptoms. They are sometimes found during routine physical exams.
- Swelling or lump in the throat.
- Pain and tenderness in the thyroid gland.
- Difficulty swallowing if a large nodule is pressing on the windpipe or esophagus.
- Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid) symptoms if the nodule produces too much thyroid hormone. Symptoms can include weight loss, sleep problems, and being irritable.
- Hoarseness (rare).

CAUSES

The thyroid gland produces hormones that help regulate different body functions. For unknown reasons, the tissue in the thyroid develops into the nodules. There are several different types of nodules that develop. They may be cystic (fluid filled) or solid. There may be one nodule or many. Thyroid nodules can cause a goiter (an enlarged thyroid).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Radiation treatment during childhood, even in small doses, to the head, neck, and upper chest.
- Exposure to nuclear radiation.
- Family history of thyroid tumors.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Benign nodules can be treated successfully.
- Most thyroid cancers are curable.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Side effects of treatment can lead to hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism.
- Rarely, spread of a malignant tumor to other places in the body.
- Injury to the vocal cords during surgery.
- Permanent hoarseness or loss of voice following surgery.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam and ask about your symptoms and history of radiation exposure. Medical tests are usually done to rule out cancer.
- Treatment will depend on the type of nodules.
- Watchful waiting is an option if the nodule is benign. This means monitoring the thyroid with testing for a time before deciding if treatment is needed.
- Drug treatment may be prescribed to help shrink benign nodules.
- Surgery (thyroidectomy) is usually performed for malignant nodules. It is usually done also for larger benign nodules or nodules where the diagnosis is unclear if they are or are not cancerous. Thyroid hormone replacement therapy will be required for life after the thyroid is removed.
- To learn more: American Thyroid Association, 6066 Leesburg Pike, Suite 650, Falls Church, VA 22041; (800) 849-7643; website: www.thyroid.org or Thyroid Foundation of America, 410 Stuart St., Boston, MA. 02116; (800) 832-8321; website: www.tsh.org.

MEDICATIONS

- Radioactive iodine or drugs to suppress (stop) the thyroid from producing hormones may be prescribed.
- Injections may be recommended for benign nodules to shrink them. It may require one or more injections over a few months.
- Antithyroid drugs or replacement thyroid hormone may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

No limits, unless surgery is performed.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of thyroid nodules or thyroid enlargement.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.

Special notes:
