

MANAGING YOUR THYROID NODULE

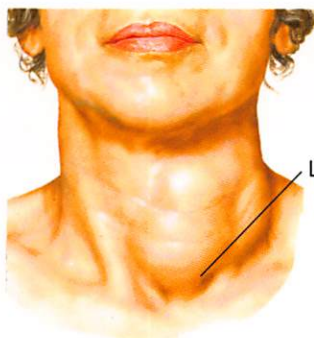
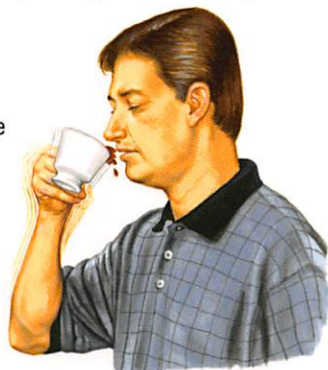


Thyroid gland with nodule

The butterfly-shaped thyroid sometimes develops a lump, or nodule.

Most nodules are benign with no noticeable symptoms, but because some can be problematic or cancerous, it is important to investigate the nature of the nodule(s).

Some nodules lead to an overactive thyroid and cause tremor, anxiety, and hunger.



Large thyroid nodule

Other nodules might be visible as a swollen thyroid.



Thyroid scan showing overactive nodule



Blood tests and imaging (x-ray, sonogram, radioactive iodine scan) can show the thyroid nodule.

What Is a Thyroid Nodule?

The thyroid gland lies in the neck. It is part of the endocrine system and produces a substance (thyroid hormone) that helps control metabolism. A thyroid nodule is a lump on this gland. Nodules may be caused by an infection, cyst, benign tumor, or malignant tumor of the thyroid. Most nodules are benign tumors or cysts filled with fluid. Because some thyroid nodules are cancerous, all nodules should be examined.

What Are the Symptoms of a Thyroid Nodule?

Most people don't know that they have a nodule. Some people may have no symptoms. Others may feel or see a soft, painless swelling near the thyroid in the neck. Most nodules are benign, cold (inactive) nodules, with no effect on health. Hot (overactive) nodules cause anxiety, sweating, weight loss, hunger, and tremor by producing excess thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism).

A rock-hard nodule that grows rapidly and causes a voice change (hoarseness) or swallowing difficulty suggests cancer and should be removed quickly.

How Are Thyroid Nodules Diagnosed?

A sonogram (which uses sound waves to make pictures of body parts) can tell whether nodules are present and whether a nodule is solid. Solid nodules may be cancerous.

Specialists may also discover nodules on x-ray films of the chest or neck done for other reasons. After nodules are found, two important questions need answers:

- Is the thyroid working normally?
- Is the nodule benign or malignant?

Thyroid function blood tests answer the first question. Most people have normal thyroid function.

A special test (radioactive iodine scan) can tell whether an overactive nodule is producing too much hormone and must be treated.

A doctor will check a tissue sample (biopsy) of the nodule to see whether the nodule is benign. A fine-needle aspiration biopsy (FNAB) is used to get this sample.