



Hashimoto's Disease

Overview

What is Hashimoto's disease?

Hashimoto's disease is a problem with your thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is located in the front of your neck, just below your Adam's apple. It makes hormones that control metabolism, the pace of your body's processes. Metabolism includes things like your heart rate and how quickly you burn calories. When you have Hashimoto's disease, your immune system begins to attack your thyroid gland, causing it to become swollen and irritated. When this happens, your thyroid can't make hormones as it normally does.

Symptoms

What are the symptoms of Hashimoto's disease?

Many people who have Hashimoto's disease have no symptoms at all. The disease progresses over time and symptoms are similar to hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid disease). This is because the attack on the thyroid causes the gland to produce fewer hormones. Symptoms of Hashimoto's disease include:

- Fatigue
- Unexpected weight gain
- Increased sensitivity to cold
- Muscle aches, cramps, tenderness or stiffness
- Pain, stiffness or swelling in your joints
- Pale, dry skin
- Puffy face
- Hoarse voice
- Constipation
- Heavier than normal periods in women
- Elevated blood cholesterol
- Depression
- Visibly enlarged thyroid
- Forgetfulness

Causes & Risk Factors

What causes Hashimoto's disease?

Hashimoto's disease is an autoimmune disease. Normally, antibodies produced by the immune system help protect the body against viruses, bacteria and other foreign substances. An autoimmune disease is when your immune system produces antibodies that attack your body's tissues and/or organs. With Hashimoto's disease, antibodies attack the

thyroid.

Who gets Hashimoto's disease?

Although Hashimoto's disease can affect people of all ages, it's most common in women who are between 30 and 50 years of age. If someone in your family has had thyroid disease, you may have an increased risk for Hashimoto's disease. Doctors are not sure why people get this disease.

Diagnosis & Tests

How does my doctor know I have Hashimoto's disease?

A blood test can tell if your thyroid gland is not working properly. It measures hormone levels to check for Hashimoto's disease.

Treatment

How is Hashimoto's disease treated?

Hashimoto's disease has no cure. However, your doctor can treat low thyroid function to minimize any long-term effects.

Treatment for Hashimoto's disease is synthetic thyroid hormone taken daily in pill form. This medicine will regulate hormone levels and shift your metabolism back to normal. It will also lower your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and may help reverse weight gain. The thyroid medicine can replace the hormones your thyroid gland usually makes. How long you need to take the medicine will depend on the results of your blood tests. For most people, taking thyroid hormone medicine causes no problems.

Taking your thyroid medicine and having regular blood tests to see how your thyroid gland is working can help prevent symptoms. Some medicines, supplements and foods may affect your body's ability to absorb the synthetic thyroid hormone. Tell your doctor if you eat large amounts of soy products, are on a high-fiber diet or take other medicines such as iron supplements, calcium supplements, cholestyramine or aluminum hydroxide (found in some antacids).

Other Organizations

- [National Organization for Rare Disorders](#)

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is the likely cause of my Hashimoto's disease?
- What are the results of my blood test(s)? What do these results mean?
- What is the best treatment option? Will I need medicine?
- What are the side effects of the medicine? How long will I need to take it?
- When can I expect relief from my symptoms?
- Am I at risk for any long-term health problems?

Source

Thyroiditis: Differential Diagnosis and Management by J Slatosky, D.O., B Shipton, D.O.,

and H Wahba, M.D. (*American Family Physician* February 15, 2000,
<http://www.aafp.org/afp/20000215/1047.html>)

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