

Pay Attention To Potential Thyroid Problems

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We seldom hear much about the thyroid unless there's something wrong. We know it's a butterfly-shaped gland located in our neck, but what else do we really know? And how do we know if something isn't quite right with our thyroid?

“The thyroid is a gland that sits in front of your neck,” said Dr. Sameer Ansar, Endocrinologist, OSF HealthCare. (Demonstration) “So this is your Adam’s apple, this is the air pipe and this is where the thyroid sits. So the thyroid is a gland that makes hormone or thyroid hormone in your blood.”

Thyroid hormones control the rate of many activities in your body, including how fast you burn calories and how fast your heart beats. All of these are your body's metabolism.

According to the American Thyroid Association, an estimated 20 million people have some form of thyroid disease and about 60 percent are unaware of their condition.

Thyroid problems include:

- Hyperthyroidism – when your thyroid gland makes more thyroid hormones than your body needs.
- Hypothyroidism – when your thyroid gland does not make enough thyroid hormones.
- Thyroid cancer – more than 44,000 people will be diagnosed with thyroid cancer this year.
- Thyroiditis – swelling of the thyroid.
- Goiter – enlargement of the thyroid gland.

According to Dr. Ansar, symptoms of hyperthyroidism include weight loss, sweating, loose stools and a fast heartbeat. Hypothyroidism symptoms are constipation, weight gain, dry skin, hair loss and hypothermia.

Women are five to eight times more likely to have thyroid problems than men.

“Mostly if I see a textbook case that will be a woman in her 20s to 40s, especially postpartum, is what we see most of the time,” said Dr. Sameer Ansar, Endocrinologist, OSF HealthCare. “But we can see it at any age, from a newborn to someone who is 95 or 100 years old. But there is a predominance of women compared to men in autoimmune issues especially thyroid disease.”

It’s also not uncommon for someone to have both thyroid disease and diabetes. The risk of developing type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes or insulin resistance increases for people with thyroid disease, especially if the patient is overweight or obese.

“Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease where your own body attacks your pancreas and tells your cells not to make any insulin so those are the people who are more prone to developing other autoimmune diseases and thyroid disease falls into that basket,” said Dr. Sameer Ansar, Endocrinologist, OSF HealthCare.

To diagnose thyroid disease, your physician will review your medical history, do a physical exam and run a blood test called thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH). Depending on the severity of the problem, treatment options include medicine, radioiodine therapy or thyroid surgery.

“If you feel like you have symptoms with your thyroid, do talk to your primary care physician,” said Dr. Sameer Ansar, Endocrinologist, OSF HealthCare. “We do have an easy test where we can find out if your thyroid is hypo, hyper or in a normal state.”

For more information on endocrinology issues, visit [**OSF HealthCare**](#).