



Thyroid Nodules

What is a thyroid nodule?

A thyroid nodule is a lump in the thyroid gland in your neck. More than 90 percent of all thyroid nodules are not cancerous. Some are actually cysts filled with fluid.

How common are thyroid nodules?

Almost 10 percent of adults have thyroid nodules. They are more common in women than in men.

What symptoms do thyroid nodules cause?

Most thyroid nodules do not cause symptoms. Some people might have trouble swallowing, or have a feeling of fullness, pain or pressure in the throat or neck. Some people might notice a lump in their neck when they look in the mirror, but most people don't. Often, the lump is found by a doctor during a routine checkup or other tests.

How can my doctor tell if I have a thyroid nodule that is cancerous?

Your doctor can do several different tests. One test is called fine-needle aspiration. Your doctor will take a tissue sample from your thyroid gland and examine it under a microscope to see if it is cancerous. The tissue sample is taken with a very small needle.

Another test your doctor may do is an ultrasound. This test uses sound waves to make a picture of the shape of the thyroid and the size of the nodules. It can help your doctor determine if the nodule is a solid tumor or a cyst filled with fluid.

A third test is a thyroid scan. Your doctor will have you drink a small amount of harmless radioactive iodine that is absorbed by your thyroid gland. Your doctor will take a special picture as this iodine glows in the gland. Your doctor can learn about the nodule depending on how much or how little of the iodine shows in the picture.

How are thyroid nodules treated?

Some patients who have nodules that aren't cancerous may take hormone pills to shrink the size of the nodules. Others may be told by their doctor to watch the nodule to see if it goes away by itself. Patients treated this way should be checked by their doctor every 6 months. As long as the nodule does not grow, there's usually no need to worry. Most cancerous nodules can be treated. If a nodule is cancerous or grows with hormone pill treatment, surgery to remove the nodule may be needed.

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