

# Medshield: What is hyperthyroidism and how is it treated?

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The thyroid is a small butterfly-shaped gland in the neck, just before the windpipe. It is crucial in regulating various metabolic processes, heart rate and body temperature. However, when the thyroid gland becomes overactive, it can result in hyperthyroidism.



It is easy to get confused between **hyper**thyroidism and **hypo**thyroidism. The difference is:

- **Hyperthyroidism** is a condition that occurs when the thyroid gland produces an excessive amount of thyroid hormone. This condition can result in various symptoms such as weight loss, hand tremors, brittle bones, vision problems and rapid or irregular heartbeat.
- **Hypothyroidism** (underactive thyroid gland) is when the thyroid gland doesn't make enough thyroid hormone. In the early stages of hypothyroidism, it does not cause noticeable symptoms. However, as time passes, hypothyroidism that is not treated can lead to health problems, including high cholesterol and heart problems.

## Three leading causes of hyperthyroidism

1. **Graves' disease:** The primary cause of hyperthyroidism is an autoimmune disorder when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks the thyroid gland, producing excessive hormones.
2. **Thyroiditis:** When the thyroid gland is inflamed due to viral or bacterial infection, causing a temporary increase in thyroid levels.
3. **Overactive thyroid nodules** are abnormal growths or noncancerous lumps in the thyroid gland that produce excessive thyroid hormone, causing an enlarged thyroid.

## Standard treatment for hyperthyroidism

High thyroid hormone levels can have harmful effects on your body. Fortunately, thyroid conditions are treatable. The best treatment for hyperthyroidism depends on several factors, including age, overall health and the underlying cause and severity of your condition.

If you have hyperthyroidism, your doctor may prescribe anti-thyroid medication to help alleviate symptoms by preventing

your thyroid gland from producing excessive amounts of hormones. Typically, symptoms of hyperthyroidism will start to improve within a couple of months. Beta-blockers are a type of medication that might be recommended to help treat symptoms such as rapid heartbeat, though they do not treat the underlying thyroid condition.

Thyroid conditions can also be treated with surgery, specifically thyroidectomy. Thyroidectomy is the surgical removal of your entire thyroid gland. Although the surgery may sound intimidating and life-threatening, living without a thyroid gland is possible. However, you will have to take hormone replacement medication for the rest of your life to maintain good health and prevent side effects.

Radiation therapy is a treatment option that decreases the size of the gland, resulting in a decrease in thyroid function or hypothyroidism. In such cases, taking medicine to replace thyroid hormones might be necessary.

The mineral iodine plays a crucial role in making thyroid hormones. When treating hyperthyroidism, it is common to follow a low-iodine diet. You should also consume non-iodised salt, egg whites, fresh or canned fruit, unsalted nuts, oats, potatoes and honey.

Hyperthyroidism requires appropriate management to restore hormonal balance and alleviate symptoms effectively. Patients must work closely with healthcare professionals and follow their recommended plan to achieve the best possible outcomes.

### **How Medshield Medical Scheme covers treatment for hyperthyroidism**

All Medshield members are entitled to cover for Prescribed Minimum Benefits ([PMBs](#)), irrespective of their chosen benefit option. Medshield covers the cost of treatment and care for a PMB according to the Scheme Rules, provided that the services are rendered by a provider that is one of Medshield's Designated Service Providers (DSP).

Hyperthyroidism is classified as a Chronic Disease List (CDL) condition and qualifies as a PMB. As a result, medical aid schemes must provide coverage for chronic medication and treatment associated with the condition. It is important, though, that you follow the requirements of your medical scheme in terms of PMBs.

Through medical interventions and lifestyle adjustments, individuals with hyperthyroidism can effectively manage their condition and live a healthy and fulfilling life. If you're experiencing thyroid hormone-related symptoms or want to know if you have any risk factors for developing thyroid disease, don't be afraid to talk to your healthcare provider. They are there to help you.

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