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Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance specialists at VistaNational Insurance Group, Inc.

# Thyroid Health

*More important than you may think*

About 20 million Americans suffer from thyroid disease and approximately 13 million more are currently undiagnosed today.

## About the Thyroid

The thyroid gland is a small, butterfly-shaped gland located at the base of the neck, just below the Adam's apple and right above the collarbone, surrounding the windpipe. The thyroid helps control the function of many of the body's organs, including the heart, brain, liver, kidneys and skin, but mostly helps to set the metabolism.

The two types of thyroid disease are hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism.

## Hyperthyroidism

This disease refers to an overactive thyroid gland, which produces too much thyroid hormone. Symptoms include:

- Goiters
- Enlarged thyroid
- Rapid heart rate
- Nervous, anxious or irritable behavior
- Trembling hands
- Unexplained weight loss
- Heat intolerance
- Increased sweating
- Hair loss
- Diarrhea
- Sleeplessness

- Decreased menstrual flow or impaired fertility

## Hypothyroidism

This is when the thyroid gland produces less than the normal amount of thyroid hormone, resulting in the decrease of many bodily functions. When the metabolism slows due to hypothyroidism, the following may occur:

- Fatigue
- Unexplained weight gain
- Dry skin and hair
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased cholesterol
- Intolerance to cold
- Constipation
- A heavier menstrual flow

## Risk Factors

Risk factors for thyroid disease include:

- *Being female* – Women are five to eight times more likely to suffer from a thyroid disorder than men are.
- *Age* – The Thyroid Foundation of America recommends that women get annual thyroid

hormone level tests yearly starting at age 50; men should as well beginning at age 60.

- *A family history* – If the disease runs in the family, testing every five years after age 35 is recommended.
- *Pregnancy* – Thyroid conditions can arise after giving birth.

## Treatment

Treatment for hyperthyroidism usually includes prescription drugs, radioactive iodine therapy and/or surgery. Hypothyroidism tends to be treated most effectively with a prescription thyroid replacement hormone.



## Did You Know...?

As many as 15 percent of people diagnosed with depression are actually suffering from hyperthyroidism, which is the more common type of thyroid disease. It is diagnosed with a simple blood test.