

Goiters

Symptoms

- Visible Enlargement
- Throat Pain
- Hoarsness
- Difficulty Swallowing

The term goiter simply means an enlarged thyroid gland. Your thyroid gland may be enlarged because it's not working properly, or it can be enlarged temporarily for a variety of reasons, and may shrink back to normal by itself. Although a goiter is usually a reliable sign of a thyroid disorder, it doesn't always need to be treated.

Many problems with your thyroid gland can cause a goiter. An example would be a lack of iodine in the diet. Iodine is an essential part of the process of making thyroid hormone. Without enough iodine, the thyroid gland cannot produce enough thyroid hormone to meet the body's needs. It then becomes enlarged when TSH tries to stimulate thyroid hormone production. In the United States iodine has been added to table salt, which is a basic part of the diet of most Americans. For this reason, the US has nearly eliminated thyroid disorders caused by lack of iodine.

Treatment

If you have a goiter that is caused by hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism, your doctor will treat the underlying disorder, thereby reducing the goiter. If you have a non cancerous goiter that is not caused by hypo- or hyperthyroidism, your doctor will determine a course of treatment based on your specific needs and overall health. If your doctor thinks treatment is appropriate, you may be given thyroid hormone therapy, which may help shrink the goiter. However, many people do not benefit from this therapy, especially people who have had untreated goiters for many years.

Another treatment option is surgery, which is occasionally done to remove the goiter if it is putting pressure on the throat, or if it is causing cosmetic concerns. Whether the decision is to treat or not to treat, your doctor will probably monitor your thyroid gland periodically to ensure that if you develop additional problems, they can be treated promptly.