



After a Thyroid Cancer Diagnosis



Thyroid cancer is a type of cancer that starts in the thyroid gland. The thyroid is below the bump in the front of your neck called the Adam's apple. It makes hormones that help control heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, and weight. If you have been told you have thyroid cancer, you've probably already had blood tests, scans, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of thyroid cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

Treatment for thyroid cancer

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of the thyroid cancer. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Most people with thyroid cancer have some type of surgery. Surgery is done to take out the tumor. Most of the time it's either part or all of your thyroid. This is called a thyroidectomy. Sometimes, lymph nodes in the neck area are removed, too.

Another treatment for some types of thyroid cancer is radioactive iodine therapy. Other treatments include radiation, chemo, targeted therapy, and hormone therapy. Sometimes, more than one type of treatment is needed. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Be sure to ask:

- What type of thyroid cancer do I have?
- What stage is the thyroid cancer, and what does that mean?
- Will I need more tests?
- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- Will I need surgery? Can all of the tumor be removed?
- Will part or all of the thyroid be removed?
- Will I need to start taking thyroid medicine?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need surgery, you will work with a surgeon to know what to expect before, during, and after surgery. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you with any side effects. You might also get tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for thyroid cancer will have the same side effects. For example, a person might have surgery. The side effects of surgery are different than the side effects of radiation, chemo, or targeted therapy. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?
- Will I be able to have children after treatment?
- Are there any clinical trials that might be right for me?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular blood tests to check your thyroid. You will also have tests to check if your cancer has come back or if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. If you have surgery to remove the tumor and thyroid, you will have a scar on your neck. Surgery and other treatments may change how your thyroid works. This could affect your body in different ways. Be sure to ask the doctor what to expect, and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had thyroid cancer are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your thyroid cancer has come back.

Many thyroid cancers can be cured. But for some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Do I need thyroid medicines and for how long?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Keeping up to date with blood tests that show how your thyroid is working is important. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating well, being active, not smoking, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy and may lower your risk of getting other cancers.

Certain conditions that increase a person's risk for thyroid cancer can run in families. Sometimes, genetic testing is done to know if you have a type that might be inherited. Talk to your cancer care team to find out if genetic testing is right for you.

Dealing with your feelings

Having thyroid cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/thyroidcancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

