Thyroiditis (inflamed thyroid)

Thyroiditis (thy-roid-i-tis) is the medical term for an inflamed thyroid. There are four different types of thyroiditis.

Hashimoto's thyroiditis
This is the name for the inflammation that happens when your immune system attacks your thyroid. The inflammation damages your thyroid and makes it underactive.

Postpartum thyroiditis
This is thyroid inflammation that happens to some women about six months after giving birth. It is caused by your immune system attacking your thyroid. Most women who get it have symptoms of an overactive thyroid for a few weeks, and then get symptoms of an underactive thyroid.

Postpartum thyroiditis is usually temporary, and usually goes away when the baby is about 1 year old. However, some women continue having an underactive thyroid and need to take thyroxine (T4) tablets.

Painless thyroiditis
This happens in women who have not had a baby, and can also happen in men. Most people get better after 12 to 18 months.

Subacute thyroiditis
This happens after you've had a virus, such as the mumps or flu. It usually causes pain in your thyroid, and an overactive thyroid at first, followed by an underactive thyroid.

The symptoms of thyroiditis depend on what type you have, and how long you've had it. You may have the symptoms of an overactive thyroid, such as anxiety, shaking, weight loss, and a racing heart. Or if your thyroid has become underactive you may feel tired, feel cold, gain weight, and be unhappy or depressed.

What causes thyroiditis?
Doctors don't always know what can make a person's thyroid inflamed.

It can happen if your immune system attacks your thyroid. It can also happen after you have a virus, which attacks you thyroid and damages the cells.

It can also happen after pregnancy, or after taking some medicines, such as amiodarone or interferon.
How is thyroiditis treated?
If you have Hashimoto’s thyroiditis you will need to take thyroxine tablets for the rest of your life. These replace the hormones that your thyroid should be making.

If you have any of the other types of thyroiditis you may get better without any treatment. However, if the symptoms of an overactive thyroid are bothering you, your doctor may prescribe a beta blocker such as propranolol to help settle the shakes and a racing heart.

An anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen can help if the inflammation is causing you pain. A few people may also need steroids to help treat the inflammation.

Local health professionals recommend the following pages.
- American Thyroid Association – Thyroiditis (www.thyroid.org/thyroiditis)
  More information about what causes thyroiditis, its symptoms, and how it’s treated.