Thyroiditis (inflamed thyroid)

Repe tenga whakawaikura

Your thyroid is a small, butterfly-shaped gland in your neck. It produces two thyroid hormones, tri-iodothyronine (T3) and thyroxine (T4). Thyroid hormones help your body use energy and stay warm. They keep your brain, heart, muscles and other organs working as they should.

Thyroiditis is a general term that means inflammation of your thyroid gland. Thyroiditis includes several different disorders.

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's caused by your immune system attacking your thyroid. Most women who get it have symptoms of an overactive thyroid for a few weeks then get symptoms of an underactive thyroid.

Postpartum thyroiditis is usually temporary and usually goes away when your baby is about 1 year old. But some women continue having an underactive thyroid and need to take thyroxine tablets.

Painless thyroiditis
This is similar to postpartum thyroiditis but can occur in men and women. It usually causes an overactive thyroid then an underactive thyroid. Most people get better after 12 to 18 months.

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

The symptoms 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. If your thyroid has become underactive, you may feel tired, feel cold, gain weight and be unhappy or depressed.

You may also get pain or swelling of your thyroid.

Diagnosing thyroiditis

The diagnosis is based on your symptoms and blood test results. You may also have a nuclear medicine scan of your thyroid.

Treating thyroiditis

If you have Hashimoto's thyroiditis, you'll 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. But if the symptoms of an overactive thyroid are bothering you, your doctor may prescribe a beta blocker such as propranolol to help treat your shaking and racing heart.

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