Thinking About Your Thyroid

Thyroid trouble can cause a range of seemingly unrelated problems, including drastic changes to your weight, energy, digestion, or mood. Learn to recognize signs of thyroid disorder so you can get treatment if needed.

The thyroid is a small but powerful butterfly-shaped gland located at the front of your neck. It controls many of your body’s most important functions. The thyroid gland makes hormones which affect your breathing, heart rate, digestion, and body temperature.

Nearly 1 in 20 Americans ages 12 and older has an underactive thyroid, or hypothyroidism. When thyroid glands don’t produce enough hormones, many body functions slow down. A smaller number of people—about 1 in 100—has an overactive thyroid, called hyperthyroidism.

Thyroid problems are most likely to occur in women or in people over age 60. Having a family history of thyroid disorders also increases the risk.

Thyroid disorders can be hard to diagnose because the symptoms are similar to other conditions. If a thyroid disorder is suspected—maybe because of a weight change or fatigue—blood tests can help confirm the diagnosis and find its cause.

If you notice signs of thyroid disease, talk with a health professional. Based on your family history, symptoms, and medical exam, your provider can help you decide if further testing or treatment is needed.