
When You Have Graves' Disease

You have been diagnosed with Graves' disease. This is an autoimmune disease. It causes an overactive thyroid gland. The gland makes too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism). Thyroid hormone is important to your body's growth and metabolism. But if you have too much thyroid hormone, your body's processes may speed up or overreact. This can cause many symptoms. Graves' disease is treated with medicines, radiation, or surgery. Below are instructions for self-care and follow-up care.

Taking your medicine

- Take your medicine exactly as directed.
- Take your medicine at the same time every day. Keep your pills in a container that is labeled with the days of the week. This will help you know if you've taken your medicine each day.
- Try to take your medicine with the same food or drink each day. This will help you control the amount of thyroid hormone in your body. You may need to take some medicines such as thyroid pills without food.
- Don't stop taking medicine. If you do, your symptoms will return. Only make changes to your medicine routine as your healthcare provider instructs.
- Keep a card in your wallet that says you have Graves' disease. Make sure it has:
 - Your name and address
 - Contact information for your provider
 - Names and doses of your medicines

Keeping track of symptoms

During your routine visits, tell your healthcare provider if you have any symptoms of too little thyroid hormone (hypothyroidism). This can be a side effect of treatment. Also tell your provider if you have symptoms of too much thyroid hormone.

Symptoms of too little thyroid hormone include:

- Tiredness or low energy
- Puffy hands, face, or feet
- Hoarseness
- Muscle pain
- Slow heartbeat (less than 60 beats per minute)
- Feeling abnormally cold when others feel comfortable
- For females, heavier menstrual periods

Symptoms of too much thyroid hormone include:

- Restlessness and shaking
- Fast weight loss
- Sweating
- Fast heartbeat (more than 100 beats per minute)
- Feeling abnormally hot when others feel comfortable

Eye care

- If you have eyelid swelling, sleep with your head raised (elevated).
- If you have eye irritation, ask your healthcare provider about ointments or artificial tears. If eye medicine is prescribed, use it as directed. Contact your provider again if the eye irritation doesn't start to improve or it gets worse. Wear glasses and sunglasses with side guards to protect your eyes from dust and wind. If you have trouble closing swollen eyelids, you may need to tape them shut at night.

Follow-up care

Follow up with your healthcare provider, or as directed. Make and keep appointments to see your healthcare provider and have regular blood tests. You will need to have blood tests for the rest of your life to check your hormone levels.

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following:

- Anxiety, shakiness, or sleeplessness that gets worse
- Sore throat while taking medicines to control hyperthyroidism
- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as advised by your healthcare provider
- Feeling sweaty and hot when others around you are comfortable
- Shortness of breath
- Trouble focusing your eyes or double vision
- Bulging eyes or vision changes
- Weight loss for no obvious reason
- Fast heartbeat (more than 100 beats per minute) or an irregular heartbeat
- Enlarged thyroid gland (goiter) that gets larger
- Diarrhea