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# Discharge Instructions for Hypothyroidism and Myxedema

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland in the lower front of the neck. The thyroid makes two hormones, triiodothyronine and thyroxine, which regulate how the body uses and stores energy (also known as the body's metabolism). You have been diagnosed with hypothyroidism. This means your thyroid gland is not making enough thyroid hormone to meet your body's needs. Hypothyroidism slows your body's normal rate of functioning. This causes mental and physical sluggishness. Symptoms may range from mild to severe. The most severe form is called myxedema coma. It is a life-threatening condition often due to longstanding, severe, and untreated hypothyroidism. This is a medical emergency.

## Medicine

Take your thyroid hormone medicine exactly as directed. You will take this medicine for the rest of your life. The goal of treatment is to return blood levels of thyroid-stimulating hormone and thyroxine to the normal range and to relieve symptoms.

- Take your medicine at the same time each 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.
- Take your medicine with a full glass of water on an empty stomach. Take it at least 30 minutes to 1 hour before you eat breakfast or 3 to 4 hours after eating.
- Don't take calcium or iron within 4 hours of taking your thyroid medicine. And ask your health care provider about taking other medicines, vitamins, antacids, and herbal supplements with your thyroid pill.
- Keep taking your medicine if you get pregnant. Many women need more thyroid medicine during pregnancy. Your provider may raise your dose.
- Your provider will regularly check your thyroid hormone levels with blood tests. If your dose is changed, you will often have lab work in 4 to 6 weeks. This is to be sure the new dose is right for you.
- Always tell your providers of any changes in your other medicines. This includes estrogens, testosterone, opioids, heart medicines, and antiseizure medicines. These changes may affect your thyroid hormone levels.
- Never stop treatment on your own. If you do, your symptoms will come back.

## Other home care

- During your routine visits, tell your health care provider about any signs of too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism), such as:
  - Restlessness.
  - Rapid weight loss.
  - Sweating.

- Fast heartbeat (palpitations).
- Eat a high-fiber, low-calorie diet. This can help ease constipation. It can also help you stay at a healthy weight.
- Exercise. Start slow, by walking 5 to 15 minutes each day. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services advises that adults with chronic conditions or disabilities, who are able, should do:
  - At least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) to 300 minutes (5 hours) a week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity.
  - Or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) to 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.
  - Or an equal mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. This can be done in 10-minute periods during the day.
- Hypothyroidism is linked to higher cholesterol and a higher risk of heart disease. Correcting this problem generally improves cholesterol levels. Talk with your provider about a healthy lifestyle.

## To learn more

The resources below can help you learn more:

- [American Thyroid Association at www.thyroid.org](http://www.thyroid.org) or 703-998-8890
- [Hormone Health Network at www.hormone.org](http://www.hormone.org) or 800-467-6663

## Follow-up care

Follow up with your health care provider as advised.

## When to contact your doctor

Contact your health care provider right away if you have:

- Extreme tiredness (fatigue).
- Puffy hands, face, or feet.
- Irregular heartbeat.
- Confusion.
- Rapid weight loss or weight gain.