



Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service



INFORMATION SHEET

GOITRE – VARITIEIS

A goitre is a thyroid swelling. Girls, young women or pregnant women often have slightly swollen thyroid glands. A smooth soft symmetrical goitre is common in people with thyrotoxicosis. Multinodular goitres can become large and occasionally cause pressure effects. Solitary thyroid nodules can be cystic or solid. They need further investigation however the majority are harmless. Thyroid inflammation, thyroiditis, may cause painful thyroid swelling that settles.

- **NON-TOXIC GOITRE** – A swelling that doesn't affect the thyroid function
- **ENDEMIC GOITRE** – The commonest cause worldwide, which results from a lack of iodine
- **AUTOIMMUNE THYROID DISEASE** – Caused by over-activity (such as Graves' Disease) and under-activity caused by (Hashimoto's Disease).
- **DRUG INDUCED** – Caused by medically prescribed drugs, for example, antithyroid drugs including 'carbimazole', certain healthfood supplements such as kelp tablets, multivitamin and mineral preparations containing iodine, or amiodarone, prescribed for an irregular heartbeat.
- **PENDRED'S SYNDROME** - Defects in enzymes involved in the synthesis of thyroid hormones. This is a rare inherited condition, with symptoms of white streaks in the hair, underactive thyroid and severe deafness.
- **THYROIDITIS** – Inflammation of the thyroid, which can sometimes be caused by a virus (de Quervain's thyroiditis) or scarring and hardening of the thyroid tissue (Riedel's thyroiditis) as a result of autoimmunity.
- **THYROID ADENOMA** – A harmless swelling of a clump of cells or nodule.
- **CARCINOMA** – Cancerous swelling of thyroid cells, an extremely rare cause of goitre (only 5 to 10 percent of single nodules) and usually easily curable.

One theory is that eating huge quantities of *cabbage* can cause goitres. Contrary to popular belief it is very unusual for goitres to cause pressure inside the neck, and swallowing and breathing are hardly ever affected. Carbimazole is not recommended to be taken long term by people with very large goitres or goitres pressing on the trachea (windpipe) – this is because the drug can cause the thyroid to swell even further.

CONFIRMING THE DIAGNOSIS

In the first instance blood tests will ascertain your thyroid hormone levels and the type of thyroid condition you have. You may need Xrays and breathing tests to determine the size and condition of your thyroid. An ultrasound scan can similarly ascertain these conditions, as can isotope scans. A fine needle aspiration can obtain thyroid cells for further analysis.

TREATMENTS

- **Smooth, symmetrical enlargement** –

If the thyroid is underactive, the treatment is thyroxine tablets. If overactive, antithyroid or radioiodine treatment is recommended. If the gland is functioning normally you can ignore the situation, or you may opt for a six-month trial of T4 to see if this will encourage the goitre to shrink. Keep alert for any symptoms of too much thyroid hormone – palpitations, anxiety and tremor. If the goitre is very large, uncomfortable or ugly, and it won't shrink with medical treatments then surgery is the only recommended option.

- **Irregular, knobbly goitre** –

If the goitre is small it may shrink sufficiently with thyroxine (for an underactive or normal gland) or antithyroid or radioiodine (for an overactive condition). It is unlikely that these treatments will not change the size or the appearance of the goitre. However if it is troubling you, you should request that it be removed, by surgery, and take T4 hormone replacement if necessary.

- **Single nodule** –

This is nearly always safest and best removed. Removal is always recommended as you can never be sure that it may not become cancerous. It would not require a big operation, since only the nodule would be removed.

- **Endemic and Iodine-Deficiency goitres** –

Millions of people in Asia and Africa have these goitres, and in some districts they are accepted as normal. They can become enormous, but the worst aspect is that many are associated with a devastating deficiency of thyroid hormones. Children are stunted, and mentally impaired, and the adults are dull and squat. Effective treatment must be preventative, and usually consists of large scale distribution of salt, bread or some other staple which has been iodized, coupled with a clean-up of the water supplies. Highly successful programmes have been run in Switzerland, Mexico and Argentina. Iodized oil by injection, lasting three years, or by mouth, lasting three months, is useful in the preventative treatment of pregnant women and young children who live in the less sophisticated parts of the world.

- **These conditions are rarely seen in the western world, and we must be grateful for the treatments and preventative measure which have taken place during this century.**

FINALLY

A goitre, like so many symptoms of thyroid conditions, can affect the outward appearance. Concentrate on making the best of hairstyles, dress and most importantly keep hopeful and keep depression at bay. Recognise your rights to treatment and face the future with a strong and determined mind to regain and maintain the quality of your life.

C.A.T.S RECOMMENDS YOU ALWAYS SEEK YOUR DOCTORS ADVICE

Disclaimer

The purpose of this information leaflet is to help those suffering with thyroid disease. Whilst every effort is made to provide accurate information, it is impossible to ensure that the information given is relevant to every individual. No responsibility is accepted by CATS and it is recommended and essential, that if in any doubt about your condition, that you should always contact your doctor, specialist physician or surgeon to seek medical advice.

References: See Reading List