



Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service

INFORMATION SHEET



THYROID CANCER

This is one of the most easily caught and treatable forms of cancer.

General signs are thyroid lumps becoming enlarged. You may notice pain in your neck tissues, jawbone or ear, have difficulty in swallowing food or liquids, wheeze or have hoarseness. All of these symptoms need immediate attention and you should attend a Consultant appointment within a few days of noticing the changes.

Thyroid cancer is typically diagnosed from a hard, smooth, painless lump that is either right on your thyroid gland or somewhere on your neck. **Only a very small proportion of such lumps are malignant.** Nevertheless these need immediate attention and assessment by your doctor and referral to a specialist. Tests, see Goitre Information Sheet, such as a needle biopsy, ultrasound or a thyroid scan will determine the diagnosis.

Treatment may be by surgery or a combination of surgery and radio-iodine treatment – depending on the type of cancer cells involved.

Total removal of the thyroid will necessitate the starting of hormone replacement treatment – i.e. thyroxine permanently administered for life. With the aid of regular blood tests, a normal balance will be achieved in time (see hypothyroidism).

Many people feel that the word “*CANCER*” means that it is time to panic. In the case of thyroid cancer there is less risk of further complications and a very high rate of recovery than in any other form of cancer. It is important for the patient to keep calm and follow the instructions and advice offered by the consultant at every stage.

Living without a thyroid will need coming to terms with replacing the hormones that will now be missing. It is therefore, more important, that you learn to manage and be aware of your condition – reporting all symptoms to your doctor and maintaining good health practices.

Do not miss taking your thyroid hormone replacement medication, or attending for regular blood tests to ascertain your medication needs. It is advisable to request that not only your T4 levels are checked but also T3 and calcitonin outputs.

People who have been treated for thyroid cancer have the unusual opportunity to see all angles of the thyroid picture. Not only do they experience a variety of diagnostic procedures and treatments, but the subsequent balancing of thyroid replacement hormone can cause them to become, at times, either hyperthyroid or hypothyroid. This makes thyroid cancer patients particularly knowledgeable of the thyroid.

We also recommend highly that cancer patients use the many supports that are available to them – including Macmillan Nurses, other related support groups – to give hope and understanding for them and to their families.

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.