



Cumbria Advisory Thyroid Service

INFORMATION SHEET



THYROID CONDITIONS IN OLDER PEOPLE

Thyroid conditions have no age limits. However, as we get older, they do become more common. Aging usually carries other conditions with it, and a thyroid complaint may be more difficult to diagnose. Again regular TSH blood tests, especially in the later years, are recommended. Once diagnosed, these would require special attention to gradual and careful treatment, and life-long assessments.

As we have always stated, by educating people, and those who care for them, thyroid problems should be recognised earlier and treated with greater safety.

Hyperthyroidism is common in the older age groups and treatment, usually by carbimazole etc, should be carefully monitored. These patients are usually given radio-iodine treatment as being a safer alternative (taking into account other conditions). Eventually, the patient, as a rule, needs treatment for hypothyroidism.

Hypothyroidism is usually more difficult to detect in older people as symptoms may mimic the aging process. Hoarseness, dry skin, deafness, muscle cramp, numbness and weakness of the hands, unsteadiness in walking, anaemia and constipation.

The treatment in these cases must be instituted with extreme care. The usual prescription of Thyroxine (T4) is given at the lowest dosage, and gradually increased until the TSH blood level comes into the “normal” range. It is not recommended that people over 65 years of age, generally receive extra T3, as in the other hormone preparations, as an abnormally high T3 level can cause a rapid pulse, increase the workload of the heart, which could in turn be dangerous for an elderly patient with an underlying heart complaint.

Thyroid nodules are usually quite common, also, but usually, after analysis (needle aspiration or biopsy), can be left alone. Only a very few are found to have suspicious cells, and surgery in these cases, is found to be either difficult or a health risk for the majority of older patients.

With good treatment and management all other thyroid sufferers should regain a better quality of living. As you watch your children’s health – so watch your parents, and educate them about thyroid conditions and treatments. You may save them from further distress by an early diagnosis.

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.