



Thyroid Nodules

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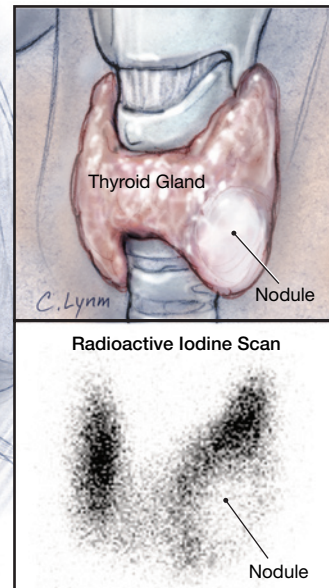
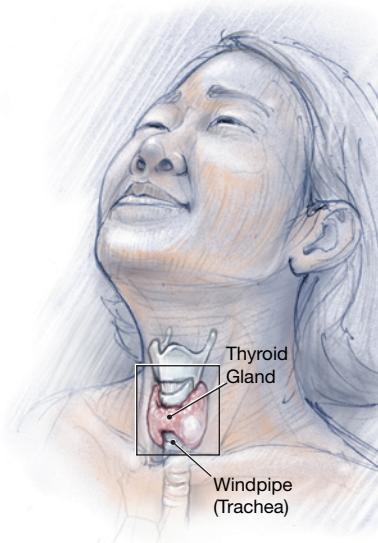
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Thyroid Nodules

Thyroid nodules are lumps or small growths in the thyroid gland, a hormone-secreting gland located in the neck.

About 90 percent of thyroid nodules are **benign** (noncancerous). In contrast to thyroid nodules, the term **goiter** is used for enlargement of the entire thyroid gland, which usually occurs because the gland is attempting to produce more thyroid hormone. The December 1, 2004, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about thyroid nodules and how they should be treated.



RISK FACTORS FOR THYROID NODULES

- Iodine deficiency—the most common cause of thyroid nodules worldwide but not in the United States—is preventable by use of iodized salt
- Older age
- Women are more likely to get thyroid nodules than men
- Having irradiation therapy on the head or neck as a child (to treat cancer or other diseases)

SYMPTOMS

- Most of the time, there are no symptoms at all.
- A nodule may be visible as a lump in the neck that moves with swallowing.
- If the nodule presses against other structures in the neck, there may be some pressure or pain.
- Rarely, a large nodule may cause problems with swallowing.

DIAGNOSING THYROID NODULES

- Thyroid nodules can sometimes be seen as lumps in the neck or can be felt by touching the neck.
- Blood tests of thyroid function should be done to see if the thyroid is making the normal amount of thyroid hormone although nodules usually do not affect thyroid hormone production.
- **Ultrasound** imaging of the thyroid using sound waves can reveal thyroid nodules and their composition.
- **Radioactive iodine scanning** can indicate whether a nodule is functioning (incorporating iodine). Almost all thyroid cancers occur in nonfunctioning nodules.
- **Fine-needle aspiration** can help determine whether the thyroid nodule is benign or malignant. A very fine needle is guided into the nodule, sometimes using ultrasound imaging, and some of the nodule cells are removed to be evaluated in the laboratory.

Source: American Thyroid Association

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TREATMENT

- Many benign thyroid nodules remain the same size and some shrink on their own.
- Synthetic thyroid hormone should be taken as a once-a-day pill only if the thyroid hormone levels are low. Administering thyroid hormone does not cause nodules to shrink.
- Nodules found to be malignant should be surgically removed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Thyroid Association
1-800-THYROID (849-7643)
www.thyroid.org

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To find this and other JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on hypothyroidism was published in the December 10, 2003, issue.

