Understanding hypothyroidism

Patient education guide | Canadian-first draft

Version	1.0	Publication date	20 November 2026
Last clinically reviewed	20 November 2026	Clinical reviewer	Dr. Eduardo Jacques
Privacy	No PHI fields, uploads or storage	Status	Clinically reviewed for publication

General health information only. This guide does not diagnose a condition or replace an assessment by a qualified clinician.

Hypothyroidism means the thyroid is not making enough hormone for the body’s needs. Symptoms overlap with many other concerns, so the story, examination and thyroid blood tests all matter.

Common symptoms

- Fatigue, weakness or reduced stamina; feeling unusually cold; constipation.
- Dry skin, brittle hair, hair loss, muscle discomfort or slower thinking.
- Low mood, concentration difficulty, heavy or irregular menstrual bleeding, or weight change.
- Symptoms may be mild, gradual or caused by more than one condition.

Symptoms versus diagnosis

A symptom list cannot diagnose hypothyroidism. Clinicians combine the timeline, examination, medication and supplement review, laboratory reference intervals and relevant life-stage context. TSH and free T4 may be interpreted together when indicated.

Possible causes

- Hashimoto’s autoimmune thyroiditis.
- Thyroid surgery, radioiodine or neck radiation.
- Postpartum or other thyroiditis.
- Lithium, amiodarone or selected cancer medicines.
- Iodine deficiency or excess, depending on context.
- Pituitary or hypothalamic disease.

Urgent warning signs

- Extreme drowsiness, confusion, unusual behaviour or loss of consciousness.
- Severe weakness with difficulty breathing or very low body temperature.
- Rapidly worsening illness in someone known to have severe untreated hypothyroidism.
- New severe chest pain, fainting, severe shortness of breath or a very fast or irregular heartbeat.
- Rapidly enlarging neck swelling, trouble breathing or inability to swallow.

If symptoms are severe, sudden or rapidly worsening, call 911 or go to an emergency department. This guide cannot assess urgency for an individual.

Sources opened and checked 20 November 2026

Canadian Task Force thyroid dysfunction: https://canadiantaskforce.ca/guidelines/published-guidelines/asymptomatic-thyroid-dysfunction/

Canadian Task Force clinician FAQ: https://canadiantaskforce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CTFPHC_Thyroid-Dysfunction_Clinican-FAQ_BW_Final_2024.pdf

CMAJ / PubMed screening guideline: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31740537/

HealthLink BC hypothyroidism: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/hypothyroidism

HealthLink BC thyroid hormone tests: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/thyroid-hormone-tests

Thyroid Foundation of Canada information package: https://thyroid.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/TFC-Information-Package-1.pdf

Government of Canada postpartum care: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/maternity-newborn-care-guidelines-chapter-5.html

Ontario OHIP coverage: https://www.ontario.ca/page/what-ohip-covers

Ontario medication coverage: https://www.ontario.ca/page/medication-coverage-results

Ontario Health811: https://www.ontario.ca/page/your-health

American Thyroid Association adult hypothyroidism: https://www.thyroid.org/hypothyroidism/

American Thyroid Association hormone treatment: https://www.thyroid.org/thyroid-hormone-treatment/

American Thyroid Association pregnancy guideline resource: https://www.thyroid.org/association-guidelines-management/

USPSTF thyroid screening: https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/index.php/recommendation/thyroid-dysfunction-screening

NICE NG145: https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng145

NHS underactive thyroid: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/underactive-thyroid-hypothyroidism/

European Thyroid Association levothyroxine guideline: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40622204/

ATA hypothyroidism booklet: https://www.thyroid.org/wp-content/uploads/patients/brochures/Hypothyroidism_web_booklet.pdf