



## January is Thyroid Awareness Month

Every time you look in the mirror, a key to your well-being is staring back at you: your thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is a small, butterfly-shaped gland located in the lower front of the neck, above the collarbones, and below the voice box (larynx).

Your thyroid gland makes hormones that help control the function of many of your body's organs, including your heart, brain, liver, kidneys, and skin. Making sure that your thyroid gland is healthy is important to your body's overall well-being.

Some patients who have an enlarged thyroid gland may also produce too much or too little thyroid hormone. Because many symptoms of thyroid imbalance may be hard to recognize and may be mistaken for symptoms caused by other conditions, the best way to know for sure about your thyroid health is to ask your doctor for a TSH (thyroid-stimulating hormone) test, a simple blood test that measures whether your thyroid gland is functioning normally.

If you have a family member with thyroid disease, are over the age of 35, or have any symptoms or risk factors associated with thyroid disease, you should talk to your doctor about getting a TSH test. It's not difficult to keep your thyroid in balance, but you need to know your numbers.

If you are diagnosed with thyroid disease, be sure to take your thyroid medicine every day, as instructed by your doctor, and refill your prescription on time so that you don't miss any doses. Your doctor may want to periodically run a TSH test to monitor your thyroid levels to ensure that you receive the optimal dose.

### How to take the Thyroid "Neck Check"

All you will need is:

- A. Glass of water
  - B. Handheld mirror
1. Hold the mirror in your hand, focusing on the lower front area of your neck, above the collarbones, and below the voice box (larynx). Your thyroid gland is located in this area of your neck.
  2. While focusing on this area in the mirror, tip your head back.
  3. Take a drink of water and swallow.

4. As you swallow, look at your neck. Check for any bulges or protrusions in this area when you swallow.

Reminder: Don't confuse the Adam's apple with the thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is located further down on your neck, closer to the collarbone. You may want to repeat this process several times.

5. If you do see any bulges or protrusions in this area, see your physician. You may have an enlarged thyroid gland or a thyroid nodule and should be checked to determine whether cancer is present or if treatment for thyroid disease is needed.