

# Thyroid Eye Disease

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This material will help you understand thyroid eye disease and how it is treated.

## **What is thyroid eye disease?**

Thyroid eye disease (also known as Grave's eye disease) is most commonly related to an overactive thyroid, or "hyperthyroidism". It can also be related to a thyroid gland that produces low or normal levels of thyroid hormone.

A dysfunctional thyroid can affect your body in a number of ways. It can also cause changes to your eyes and vision. Symptoms range from mild to severe and may include:

- Swelling of the eyelids and tissue around the eye
- Bulging appearance of eyes (eye protrusion)
- Eyelid retraction (when the eyelids are more open than usual)
- Dry eyes
- Watery and red eyes
- Feeling of pressure or pain in the eye sockets and behind the eyes
- Double vision
- Sensitivity to light
- Loss of vision

For some people, these symptoms are the first sign of thyroid disease. Others do not notice symptoms in their eyes until months later.

## **What causes thyroid eye disease?**

A dysfunctional thyroid as caused by Grave's disease is an autoimmune condition. This means that antibodies (part of your immune system) attack your thyroid gland. It most commonly responds by being overactive and producing extra thyroid hormone. But the thyroid hormone level may also be

lower than normal. The same antibodies may also affect your eyes. They can attack the eye muscles and connective tissue within the eye socket. This can cause these structures to become larger.

### **How is thyroid eye disease treated?**

The first part of treatment is to treat any active eye disease. During this phase, the goal is to preserve eyesight and relieve symptoms. As part of your treatment, your doctor will want to carefully monitor you until your condition is stable. This will typically take 2-3 years from when your symptoms first start. The exact treatment during this time depends on how severe your symptoms are. Your doctor may recommend that you:

- Use artificial tears or lubricating ointment to help with symptoms of dry eye
- Wear sunglasses to reduce sensitivity to light
- Sleep with eye shields and your head elevated
- Wear special glasses with prisms to help with double vision.

You may have active inflammation or more serious symptoms threatening your vision. In these cases your doctor may prescribe a steroid medication or radiation treatment. These can help to reduce the inflammation.

In some cases, surgery may also be recommended. This will help to reduce swelling and prevent vision loss.

Once you are in remission, treatment will focus on correcting any lasting changes that resulted from the disease. Your doctor may recommend orbital decompression surgery to help your eyes return to a normal position. If you have symptoms of double vision, eye muscle surgery can help reposition your eye muscles.

Reconstructive eyelid surgery can also help improve the appearance of the eyelids. This surgery can adjust the position of the eyelids and/or remove excess fat in the eyelids.

**For more information, scan these codes with your smartphone or visit the websites listed.**



<http://www.kellogg.umich.edu/patientcare/conditions/graves.disease.html>



<http://www.asoprs.org/files/public/InfoThyroid.pdf>

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Last Revised 04/2015