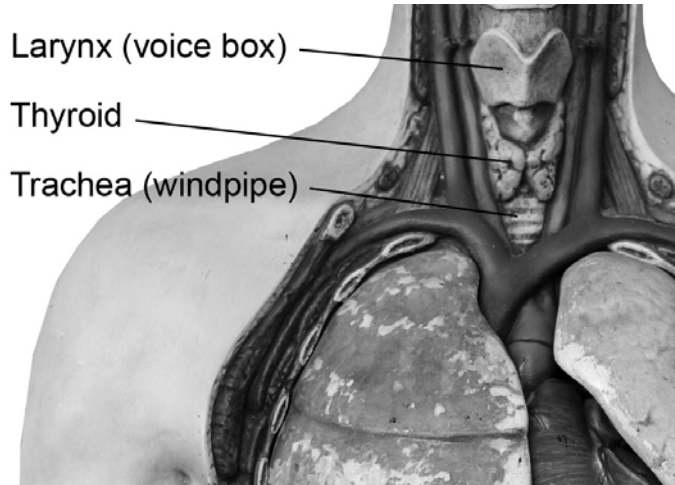


Goiters

A goiter is abnormal growth of the thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is at the base of the neck below the voice box. This gland makes hormones that control many processes in your body such as temperature and healthy hair and skin.



Anatomy of the neck around the thyroid

Having a goiter does not always cause problems with the way the thyroid gland works. Large goiters can cause difficult breathing, difficult swallowing, weight gain, weight loss, or sleep problems.

Signs of Goiters

The most common sign is a lump or swelling near the voice box. Here are some other warning signs:

- Coughing
- Difficult breathing or swallowing
- Hoarseness
- Tight feeling in the throat

If you have any of these signs for more than two weeks, talk with your doctor. They can be signs of goiters or other serious conditions.

Risk Factors

Some conditions raise the risk of getting goiters:

- Lack of iodine in the diet
- Being female
- Age 40 or older
- Personal or family history of goiters
- Pregnancy and menopause
- Certain medicines
- Radiation treatments in the neck or chest
- Radiation from nuclear tests or exposures at work

How Are Goiters Diagnosed?

Your doctor checks the size of the thyroid gland by feeling your neck during a physical exam. Usually, this is how goiters are first found.

These tests can tell your health care team more about the goiter:

- Thyroid ultrasound
- Biopsy
- Thyroid function test

Treatment

Some goiters do not need treatment. Depending on the cause or size of the goiter, your doctor may recommend one of these treatments:

- Surgery to remove large goiters that cause breathing problems
- Iodine supplements for goiters that happen from lack of iodine
- Radioactive iodine for goiters from Graves' disease
- Surgery or radiation treatment if the goiter is caused by thyroid cancer