

Initial information about hypothyroidism

Your doctor has diagnosed you with hypothyroidism (decreased function of the thyroid), a condition that needs to be treated. You have a prescription for thyroxine tablets which make up for the lost production of thyroxine in your thyroid. Please read the package leaflet of the thyroxine carefully.

Take the thyroxine tablet(s) on an empty stomach at the latest 30 minutes before breakfast. The thyroxine can also be taken on an empty stomach after a two-hour fast before bed. The medication should be taken regularly every day. There must be at least four hours between taking the thyroxine and the following preparations or medications: iron products, calcium products, antacids (acid neutralizers), cholestyramine and colestipol. The two latter mentioned are cholesterol-reducing medications. Before taking any medications, vitamins or herbal supplements, check with your doctor or the pharmacy to ensure that it is safe to take with thyroxin.

Your doctor has prescribed an individually suited dose of thyroxine for you.

Treatment is usually started with a dose that is smaller than the final maintenance dose. The dosage will be carefully adjusted and increased gradually until it reaches a level that is suitable for you. The goal of the treatment is for the TSH value to go down and the T4v to reach levels within the reference range to a level that is suitable for you.

Blood values are checked no later than 2–3 months after starting treatment or dose adjustment. When you feel well and the blood values have reached their proper levels, it is generally sufficient to have a check up once a year.

Since treatment is on your own responsibility,

It is important to follow your doctor's orders, report any changes in your condition or symptoms, and inform the doctor or nurse if the thyroxine dose is not effective.

Please don't change the dosage of your medication without first talking with your doctor.

After starting the medication, you may feel much better already within a few weeks. However, please be patient. Keep in mind that you may have had hypothyroidism for many years and it may take some months, or even longer, before you feel better.

When starting the medication or after a dose increase of thyroxine, you may experience palpitations. This is usually temporary.

Dosage and treatment are individually tailored for each patient, and other illnesses or medications may affect your condition.

What is the thyroid and what causes hypothyroidism?

The thyroid gland, located in the front of your throat, affects various bodily functions such as metabolism, heat regulation, energy, gut, mood and fat metabolism.

The thyroid produces a hormone called thyroxine (T4) which is converted in the body into the effective form, triiodothyronine (T3).

The thyroid gland is regulated by thyrotropin (TSH), a hormone that is produced by the pituitary gland.

Hypothyroidism may be caused by various reasons. The most common cause is a chronic thyroid inflammation (autoimmune thyroiditis). This inflammation is due to

self-produced antibodies against the thyroid. Hypothyroidism may also result from other causes, such as removal of the thyroid, excessive function of the thyroid, radioiodine therapy to the organ or radiation therapy to the neck area. A rare cause of hypothyroidism is decreased TSH production by the pituitary gland.

In hypothyroidism, the concentration of free thyroxine (T4v) in the blood is low and the concentration of TSH is high. This is due to the pituitary producing excessive amounts of TSH so that the thyroid starts to produce enough of the thyroid hormone. If hypothyroidism is due to poor function of the pituitary, both TSH and T4v are low.

For more information about hypothyroidism, go to the web page of the Finnish Thyroid Association www.kilpirauhasliitto.fi.

Tuesdays and Wednesday at 5–7 PM, nurses of the association answer your calls on number 044 7888 899.

If you have questions about your own illness, please consult your doctor.