

# Thyroid Eye Disease

Register using a self check-in kiosk in the main entrance of the Centennial or the Dickson Building, Victoria General site.

Next, go to the Eye Care Centre in the Centennial Building, 2A.

# Thyroid Eye Disease

Thyroid eye disease (also known as Graves' eye disease) may happen when you have a problem with your thyroid gland.

The most common symptom is an overactive thyroid gland. Symptoms of an overactive thyroid gland include:

- › fast pulse
- › hot, dry skin
- › thyroid gland gets bigger (goiter)
- › weight loss
- › hand tremors

Thyroid eye disease can affect the skin, fat, and muscles around your eyeball. It can cause redness and swelling within your eye socket.

## **Symptoms of thyroid eye disease include:**

1. Less tear production, which may cause:
  - › dry eyes
  - › watery, gritty eyes
  - › soreness
  - › sensitivity to lights
  - › blurry vision

2. Eyelid retraction (eyelids pull back from the eyes), which may cause:
  - › protruding (sticking out) eyes that look like you are staring
  - › trouble blinking, which can cause dry eyes
3. Swelling of muscles and fat behind your eyeball, which may cause:
  - › proptosis (tissues push your eyes forward so that they “bulge”)
  - › dry eyes because your eyelids cannot close completely
4. Inflammation (swelling) of soft tissues around your eye, which may cause your eyelids to become puffy and red, and cause painful eye sockets (orbits)
5. Muscles that move your eyeball become swollen, which may cause double vision because your eyes are not able to move together
6. Damage to the surface of your eye (cornea) from dryness, poor blinking, and exposure to the air

7. Lowered vision because the swelling around your eye may compress (squash) the optic nerve. This may cause:
- › blurred or possible loss of vision if not treated
  - › colours that look dull or “washed out”

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

- Blood tests (to find a thyroid problem)
- Eye examination by an ophthalmologist (eye doctor)
- CT scan or MRI (to check for eye muscles that have gotten bigger)

## **What is the treatment?**

Your thyroid condition and thyroid eye disease will be treated separately.

Your thyroid condition will be looked after by an endocrinologist (doctor who deals with hormones). They may order regular thyroid tests. Your thyroid eye disease will be looked after by an ophthalmologist (eye doctor).

Thyroid eye disease has an active phase followed by a quiet (disease burnout) phase. The active phase usually lasts from 6 months to 2 years and gets better on its own. The goal of treatment is to help your symptoms and protect your eyes. Treatment includes:

- For dry eyes, use “artificial tears” eye drops. Before bed, use a lubricating ointment. This is a cream that is safe for your eyes, that helps with dryness. For example, “Systane® Nighttime” or “Refresh P.M.®”.
- Use humidifiers in your bedroom and living room.
- If your eyelids do not close fully, your eye doctor may suggest gently taping your eyelids closed at night. Ask your pharmacist about types of eyelid tape that are hypoallergenic (something that will not cause an allergic reaction) and gentle.
- If you have double vision which is not stable, you may cover one eye with an eye patch or a filter you can see through. Temporary stick-on prisms, known as “Fresnel Prisms”, may be used.

Less commonly, if your vision is at risk, your doctor may suggest immunosuppressant treatment (usually steroids) to lower inflammation.

In severe (very bad) advanced stages (about 1 in 20 cases), increased pressure inside the orbits may cause the optic nerve to be compressed (squashed). This needs treatment right away.

- Orbital radiotherapy treatment (radiation) may be used to treat the tissues around the eyeball to lower optic nerve damage.
- Orbital decompression surgery may be needed. This surgery removes some of the bone and fat in your eye socket to give more room for the swollen muscles and take pressure off the optic nerve.

When your thyroid eye disease is in the quiet phase (no longer active):

- Radioactive iodine treatment may be used to treat your overactive thyroid.
- Surgery on your eye muscles can help improve the alignment of the eyes and lessen double vision.

- Eyelid surgery may help to correct the position of the upper and lower eyelids. This will help them to close properly and protect your eyes.

## **What can I do to help?**

- Quit smoking. Smoking greatly raises your chances of getting thyroid eye disease. If you have thyroid eye disease, smoking can make the disease worse and treatment less effective.
- Ask your primary health care provider or ophthalmologist about selenium. They may suggest selenium supplements or eating more foods with selenium. Brazil nuts are a natural source of selenium.
- Use eye drops to moisten (wet) your eyes as often as needed.
- Avoid windy or dusty places.
- Take regular breaks from reading and when using screens (TV, computer, tablet, smartphone).
- If you are sensitive to bright lights, try wearing sunglasses or tinted eye shields.

- Apply an ice water compress (cold, wet cloth) to your closed eyelids to lower swelling. **Do not apply ice or ice packs directly to your eyelids.**
- Sleep with your head slightly propped up to lower swelling overnight.

#### Looking for more health information?

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Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.