

Know your thyroid facts

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(HealthDay)—Thyroid cancer diagnoses have spiked for U.S. women this past decade.

That's why it's essential to pay attention to this small gland at the base of your neck. The thyroid is an important part of your endocrine system, producing a hormone that helps control metabolism.

"While there is no known way to prevent [thyroid cancer](#), some things that may help to maintain thyroid health are the lifestyle choices you make," said endocrine surgeons Dr. Amanda Laird and Dr. Toni Beninato, of Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey in New Brunswick.

[Thyroid disorders](#) can range from a small, harmless goiter (an enlarged gland) to [cancer](#) that may need to be treated with radioactive iodine or surgery.

Laird and Beninato offered these tips for good thyroid health:

- Start by maintaining a [healthy lifestyle](#). Eat nutritious foods, including a variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole-grain foods.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Strive to be regularly physically active to improve your overall health.
- Learn the signs of [thyroid cancer](#), the most common of which is a painless lump or swelling in the neck. "Other symptoms only tend to occur after the condition has reached an [advanced stage](#), which may include unexplained hoarseness or difficulty swallowing that does not go away," Laird and Beninato said in a Rutgers news release. "You may also experience a feeling of pressure at the point of the mass."
- If you do notice something abnormal, tell your doctor. "The best way to determine if you have a thyroid condition is to consult your physician as soon as possible," the doctors said.

Masses in the neck should be evaluated first with a physical exam. Then your doctor can decide whether further testing is needed.

An ultrasound may be done to evaluate [thyroid](#) masses, followed by a biopsy, depending on the results.

Laird and Beninato recommended seeing a provider familiar with the latest advances in genetic counseling and testing if your family has a history of [thyroid cancer](#).

More information: The U.S. National Cancer Institute has more information on [thyroid cancer](#).

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