



This NCCN QUICK GUIDE™ sheet summarizes key points from the complete [NCCN Guidelines for Patients: Thyroid Cancer](#). These guidelines explain which tests and treatments are recommended by experts in cancer. To view and download the guidelines, visit [NCCN.org/patients](https://www.nccn.org/patients) or, to order printed copies, visit [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

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## What is thyroid cancer?

- The thyroid is a gland in the neck. Using a mineral called iodine, the thyroid makes hormones that help regulate body temperature, blood pressure, metabolism, and other body functions. Certain foods and iodized salt contain iodine.
- Thyroid cancers start as small, often round areas of atypical tissue within the thyroid called nodules. Most thyroid nodules are not cancerous.
- Women are 3 times more likely than men to develop a thyroid cancer. Compared to other cancers, thyroid cancer is often diagnosed earlier in adulthood.

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## How is thyroid cancer diagnosed?

- If a thyroid nodule is known or suspected, a thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) blood test and a neck ultrasound are recommended.
- The TSH and ultrasound test results determine whether a needle biopsy (fine-needle aspiration) of the nodule is needed.
- If a biopsy is needed, the removed tissue is sent to a pathologist for examination. The pathologist determines whether the nodule is cancerous. For most thyroid cancers, the cancer type can also be determined.

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## What is the treatment for thyroid cancer?

- Surgery is needed for almost all thyroid cancers. Careful monitoring (active surveillance) may be an option for some very low-risk thyroid cancers.
- Surgery may involve removing the entire thyroid gland (total thyroidectomy) or just the half with cancer (lobectomy). Lobectomy may be an option for small and low-risk thyroid cancers.
- Thyroid hormone replacement therapy is needed lifelong after total thyroidectomy. After lobectomy, about 1 in 5 people require thyroid hormone replacement.
- Levothyroxine (eg, Levoxyt<sup>®</sup>; Synthroid<sup>®</sup>) is the most commonly used thyroid hormone replacement therapy.

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## What are the different types of thyroid cancer?

<b>Papillary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The most common type of thyroid cancer</li> <li>■ Usually grows slowly and has very good treatment outcomes</li> <li>■ Treated with surgery to remove part or all of the thyroid</li> </ul>	<b><u>19</u></b>
<b>Follicular cell</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The second most common type of thyroid cancer</li> <li>■ Known for invading blood vessels in and around the thyroid</li> <li>■ Cannot be diagnosed by needle biopsy (FNA) alone</li> <li>■ Treated with surgery to remove part or all of the thyroid</li> </ul>	<b><u>22</u></b>
<b>Hürthle cell</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Uncommon and more aggressive than papillary or follicular carcinomas</li> <li>■ Known for invading blood vessels in and around the thyroid</li> <li>■ Cannot be diagnosed by needle biopsy (FNA) alone</li> <li>■ Treated with surgery to remove part or all of the thyroid</li> </ul>	<b><u>22</u></b>
<b>Medullary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The third most common type of thyroid cancer</li> <li>■ Starts in thyroid “C cells”, which make a hormone called calcitonin</li> <li>■ About 1 in 5 medullary thyroid cancers is inherited</li> <li>■ Treated with total thyroidectomy</li> </ul>	<b><u>29</u></b>
<b>Anaplastic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The least common and most aggressive type of thyroid cancer</li> <li>■ Most often affects older adults</li> <li>■ Many people with this type have (or had) a more common type of thyroid cancer</li> <li>■ Supportive care is essential throughout the treatment process</li> </ul>	<b><u>36</u></b>

## How do I decide between treatment options?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Don't be shy about asking your doctors questions. They are there to help.</li> <li>■ Get a second opinion. Even doctors get second opinions!</li> <li>■ Support groups can be helpful. You can learn a lot from others with thyroid cancer.</li> <li>■ Compare the benefits and risks of each treatment option.</li> </ul>	<b><u>45</u></b>
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