

# Diagnosing Thyroid Cancer - A Quick Guide



## Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing thyroid cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Tests for thyroid cancer
- Further tests for thyroid cancer
- What to ask your doctor

## Tests for thyroid cancer

Usually you begin by seeing your GP, who will examine you and ask about your general health. Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms, and will examine your neck. They will probably ask you to go for a blood test to check your thyroid hormone levels. If your doctor then feels that you need further tests, they will refer you to a specialist at your local hospital.

## At the hospital

The specialist will ask about your medical history and symptoms. They will then examine you by feeling your neck. They may ask you to have a chest X-ray to check your general health. You will have some blood tests to check your thyroid hormone levels. Your doctor may arrange a needle

biopsy and an ultrasound scan. These tests will be in the outpatient department.

A needle biopsy is used to take a small amount of thyroid tissue, to examine. This is the only way to be sure if a lump is cancer or not. The doctor puts a very thin needle into the lump and sucks out a small amount of fluid and cells. They send the biopsy sample to the laboratory to be looked at under a microscope. A needle biopsy is usually done under a local anaesthetic. Sometimes a surgical biopsy is needed. This means the doctor makes a small cut with a scalpel. This is usually done under general anaesthetic.

## Further tests for thyroid cancer

If tests show you have thyroid cancer, your specialist will ask you to have further tests to see how big the cancer is and whether it has spread. Further tests will help your doctor to decide which treatment you need. Your doctor will examine your neck and nearby areas to see if there are any enlarged lymph nodes that may contain cancer cells from your thyroid cancer. Further tests may include CT or MRI scans. Sometimes, thyroid scans (using a very small amount of radioactive iodine) or PET scans are used after treatment. They can see if any cancer cells are left.



## After the tests

You will be asked to go back to the hospital when your test results have come through. This is bound to take a little time, even if only a day or two. You may feel very anxious during this time. While you are waiting for results it may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

## What to ask your doctor about tests for thyroid cancer

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- How urgent are the tests?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Will the tests show whether my cancer can be operated on?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Do any of the tests have after effects?
- Can I have these tests as an outpatient?
- Should I bring someone with me when I have the tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?

## More information

For more information about thyroid cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

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