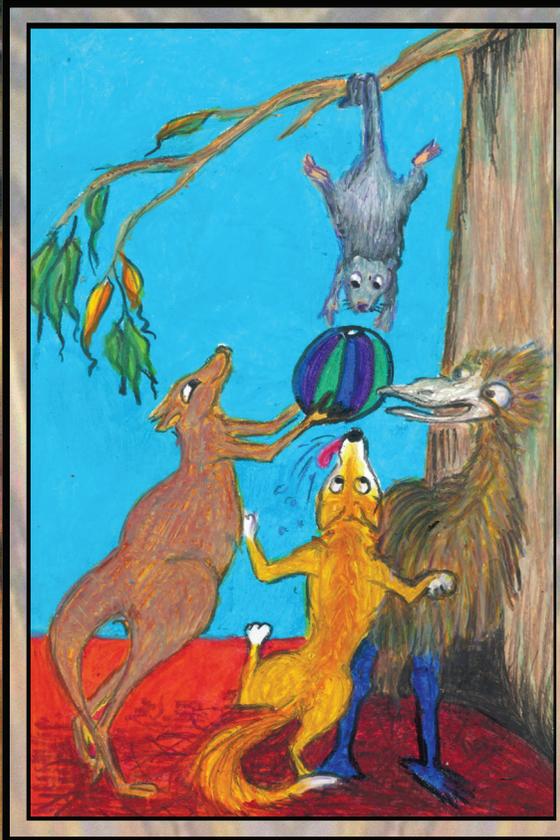


Things that may be helpful

Graves' disease can be well managed, but it is useful to:

- ➡ Learn as much as you can about your illness.
- ➡ Always take the drugs prescribed by your doctor.
- ➡ Monitor your progress regularly and get regular medical checks to make sure your treatment is working properly.
- ➡ Get your eyes checked on a regular basis to make sure there are no problems.
- ➡ Be careful in the sun and use sun protection measures of sunscreen, hats and sunglasses.
- ➡ Remember, overactivity, restlessness and a short attention span can occur if your thyroid hormone levels are too high, so see your doctor if this happens.
- ➡ Your diet should include a variety of foods. Don't eat too many foods that contain high levels of sugars, salt and fats.
- ➡ Drink adequate fluids, in particular water.



WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Autoimmune Resource & Research Centre

Telephone: 02 49214095

email: arrc@autoimmune.org.au

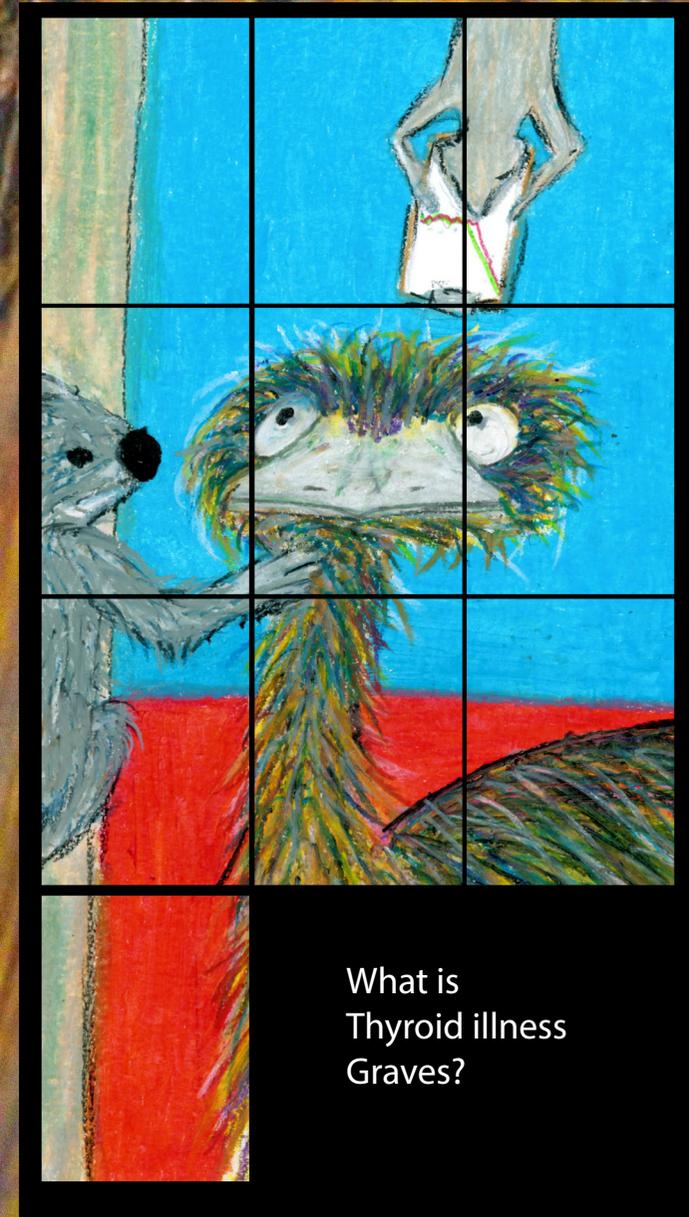
web: www.autoimmune.org.au

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Thyroid illness-Graves



What is
Thyroid illness
Graves?

THE THYROID GLAND

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland at the front of the neck. It makes and releases thyroid hormone which is a chemical that affects every cell in the body and controls many of the body's functions. When the body makes too little thyroid hormone this is called hypothyroidism. Too much thyroid hormone made by the body is called hyperthyroidism.

What is Graves' disease?

Graves' disease is a common cause of hyperthyroidism in people including children and young adults. Here, the thyroid gland makes too much thyroid hormone. Graves' disease is a chronic illness which means that you will have this illness for life; however, it is an illness that can be managed very well so that you enjoy a full life.

What causes it?

Our body uses the immune system to protect itself from harmful things such as bacteria and viruses (bugs). We are not sure why some people have an immune system that does not work properly but we do know that when some people get sick it is caused by the system being over active and causing harm to itself. This is called an autoimmune illness. In Graves disease, the body's own immune system attacks the thyroid gland and upsets the normal production of thyroid hormone. The illness can start at any age and develops slowly.

If you have a family member with this illness you may be more likely to get it because of your genetics. There is nothing you could have done to stop yourself getting the illness. We also know that you cannot catch the illness from other people.

What are the signs and symptoms?

As the thyroid gland continues to make too much thyroid hormone, symptoms become more obvious, but this usually happens slowly. Symptoms may include:

- ➡ Increased energy which can cause hyperactivity.
- ➡ Easily distracted.
- ➡ Restless.
- ➡ Enlarged thyroid gland.
- ➡ Fast pulse.
- ➡ Nervousness.
- ➡ Unable to tolerate heat.



Increased energy

Hyperactivity

Nervousness

Shaky hands

Enlarge thyroid gland

Fast pulse

Unable to tolerate heat

Accelerated growth rate

Restless

Diarrhoea

Muscle weakness

Sleep & behavioural problems

EASILY DISTRACTED

Weight loss



- ➡ Weight loss.
- ➡ Accelerated growth rate.
- ➡ Shaky hands.
- ➡ Muscle weakness.
- ➡ Diarrhoea.
- ➡ Sleep and behavioural problems.
- ➡ Irritated eyes or eyes that look like they are staring or bulging.



How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will take a medical history and from this decide what tests should be done. Graves' disease can be diagnosed through simple blood tests.



How is it treated?

Treatment usually starts with medications that are known as antithyroid drugs. This is the preferred treatment as it gives your body a chance to go back to producing normal hormone levels without destroying or removing the thyroid gland. This is sometimes called remission. If this medication does not work you may be given a course of radioactive iodine therapy to destroy cells in the thyroid gland so that less thyroid hormone is produced. If this does not work your doctor will consider removing the thyroid gland. Removal of the gland is only done if all other treatments don't work.

If your thyroid gland is removed, you will then need hormone replacement therapy, with a pill taken once a day to replace the hormone that your body is no longer making. The dose that you will need to take depends on your age, as your need for thyroid hormone varies during your life.

Your doctor will order blood tests regularly to make sure that normal hormone levels are maintained and that you remain well.

Signs and symptoms should disappear with treatment. You will need to receive treatment for life.

