

Over Active Parathyroid: Basic Facts You Should Know

**What are parathyroid glands?*

At the front of your neck, behind the thyroid gland, are several pea-sized glands. Most people have four of these glands, but some people are born with five or six. They are called parathyroid glands. Though the names are similar, the thyroid gland and the parathyroid glands act differently. They each have their own job to perform in the body.

**What is over active parathyroid?*

The parathyroid glands make parathyroid hormone (PTH). This hormone helps keep the proper level of calcium and phosphorus in your body. Calcium is needed to build bone, send signals from your brain through the nerves and help muscles move. The parathyroid works by measuring the amount of calcium in the blood and then releases just enough PTH so your body takes the right amount of calcium from the food you eat and prevents the kidney from letting go of calcium in your urine.

Over active parathyroid (hyperparathyroidism) is when these glands release too much PTH.

There are two types of over active parathyroid:

Primary hyperparathyroidism is usually caused by a small growth on one of these glands. The growth irritates the gland and it makes too much PTH.

Secondary hyperparathyroidism is caused by a long lasting disease like kidney failure. In kidney failure, vitamin D is not changed by the kidneys to its active form. This leads to low vitamin D levels and low calcium levels. It also leads to high phosphorous levels. When the parathyroid sees the low calcium, it releases too much PTH trying to raise the calcium level.

Too much PTH in the blood signals the bones to let go of the calcium in them and also tells your intestines to take more calcium from food in an

attempt to make the calcium level go up. Of course, the problem is the kidney, so the parathyroid cannot correct the problem.

****How is it diagnosed?***

A routine blood test can check for blood calcium levels. If the calcium level is high, your doctor may suspect that the parathyroid glands are making too much PTH. Although this is a good first indication, it takes another blood test looking for PTH levels before the doctor can be sure. In kidney disease, the calcium level may be normal but the PTH level high. Routine lab work may, therefore, include a PTH level to diagnose this common problem early.

****Common Symptoms***

With a mild case of over active parathyroid, you may not have any symptoms at all or they may be very mild. Weakness, tiredness, aches and pains are normally the first symptoms of this disorder. A more severe case of this disorder may cause high blood pressure, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, constipation, and having a hard time concentrating. A more frequent need to go to the bathroom may also occur. Although you may not know it or feel it, your bones may be getting weak and brittle and becoming easier to break. Kidney stones may form from the large amounts of calcium and phosphorous in the urine.

**** Treatment Options***

You and your doctor should talk about the best way to treat your over active parathyroid glands. Everyone is different and the treatment that works best for you must take into account your overall health, you diet, what medicines you can take, and your own thoughts about how to treat the disorder.

With a mild form of the disorder, no treatment may be needed right away. Routine check ups to measure calcium levels and bone strength may be all that is needed.

Your doctor may recommend drugs that lower the amount of PTH. Your doctor may also give you Vitamin D tablets. In some cases, it may be best to remove the parathyroid glands. If you are given medication for this problem, you will need follow up lab tests. Your doctor will inform you what is required.