

Thyroid Cancer

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland located at the base of the neck. It produces thyroid hormone, which controls our bodies' overall metabolism.

Thyroid cancer is very common, particularly in women. It is now one of the most common cancers found in women. In most patients it does not cause any symptoms, though it sometimes can lead to difficulty swallowing, voice changes or a lump in the neck. Often thyroid cancers are found within [nodules](#) that are either felt by the patient or their doctor. These nodules are also frequently found incidentally, when the patient has a radiology test not related to the thyroid. A biopsy may be performed based on physical exam and radiographic findings. In some patients, a biopsy may show a cancer before surgery and in others a cancer may only be found after surgery is completed.

TYPES OF THYROID CANCER

There are several types of thyroid cancer. Most patients have papillary thyroid cancer, which typically has a good prognosis. The main treatment for thyroid cancer is surgery. This surgery will involve removing the thyroid and sometimes enlarged lymph nodes.

- **Papillary:** The most common form of thyroid cancer. This type of cancer, which tends to grow slowly, has a good prognosis. It is treated with thyroid surgery and, in selected cases, radioactive iodine.
- **Follicular:** This type of thyroid cancer also typically has a good overall prognosis. It is treated similarly to papillary carcinoma, with thyroid surgery and in selected cases, radioactive iodine.
- **Medullary:** This form of thyroid cancer develops from cells in the thyroid gland that are different from papillary and follicular thyroid cancers. While the prognosis with medullary cancer is not as favorable when compared with those types of thyroid cancers, it is also much less common (between 5-10 percent of all thyroid cancers). Medullary thyroid carcinoma can be associated with several inherited syndromes but most cases happen in patients without any family history. Treatment for medullary thyroid cancer is primarily surgery.
- **Anaplastic:** This is the least common type of thyroid cancer but it is very aggressive. This cancer often grows very quickly and requires a multidisciplinary medical team to determine the best treatment plan.