Downloads: Thyroid Cancer
What is Thyroid Cancer?

- Thyroid Cancer: Cancer that starts in the cells of the thyroid, most commonly in follicular cells.
- The thyroid produces hormones that regulate different body functions, including:
  - Heart rate
  - Blood pressure
  - Body temperature
  - Weight

Risk Factors

- Occurs more often in women than in men.
- Exposure to high levels of radiation is a risk factor.
- Inherited gene mutations can predispose individuals.
- Healthy weight reduces risk in men and women.

Common Signs and Symptoms

- Often asymptomatic
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Difficulty swallowing
- Lump on throat
- Pain in neck or throat
- Voice changes
Thyroid Cancer

Clinical Implications

- May present similarly to other head and neck cancers
- Neck lymphedema after lymph node dissection
- Difficulty swallowing and/or speaking
- Impaired soft tissue mobility of neck from radiation and scar tissue
- Shoulder dysfunction from cranial nerve XI damage

Treatment Options

- Surgery
  - Thyroidectomy
  - Lobectomy
  - Lymph Node Dissection
- Thyroid Hormone Therapy
- Radioactive Iodine
- Radiation
- Chemotherapy
- Targeted Therapy
Thyroid Cancer

Physical Therapist’s Role

**Screen**
Screen for associated signs & symptoms and promote annual physical exam with primary care provider

**Intervene**
Identify and treat impairments from thyroid cancer and treatment options

**Refer**
Refer to other healthcare professionals for impairments identified beyond scope of practice, (i.e. speech-language pathologist)

**Educate**
Promote physical therapy from diagnosis through survivorship to improve quality of life and outcomes
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Takeaways

1. Although not classified as a head and neck cancer, thyroid cancer can cause similar impairments

2. Lymphedema and musculoskeletal impairments that arise can be managed with physical therapy

3. Refer to a speech-language pathologist for any speech or swallowing dysfunction

4. Advocate for lifelong physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight to decrease risk of thyroid cancer
Resources


Haugen BR, Alexander EK, Bible KC, et al. 2015 American Thyroid Association Management Guidelines for Adult Patients with Thyroid Nodules and Differentiated Thyroid Cancer: The American Thyroid Association Guidelines Task Force on Thyroid Nodules and Differentiated Thyroid Cancer. Thyroid (New York, N.Y.). 2016;26:1-133.


