



Learning about thyroid cancer is very important



Your thyroid gland is a butterfly shaped gland that sits behind the Adam's apple (on your neck below your chin).

The thyroid produces a hormone called the thyroid hormone that carries a signal from one cell to another.

This gland has an important role in maintaining chemical changes in the body to maintain life.

In some people, the thyroid gland sends out too much thyroid hormone which is called hyperthyroidism.

Hyperthyroidism can cause irregular heartbeat, weight loss, hunger and problems sleeping.

If the gland does not send out enough thyroid hormone, this is called hypothyroidism. Hypothyroidism can cause tiredness and weight gain (American Cancer Society).

What is Thyroid Cancer?

According to the National Cancer Institute approximately 25,000 women and 8,000 men are diagnosed with thyroid cancer each year.

The American Cancer Society estimates that in the year 2009, 910 women and 680 men will die of thyroid cancer. It is a cancer that mostly affects people ages 20 to 55 years old.

Cancer cells are created when the system that creates cells breaks down. Cells build up creating a tumor.

Because the thyroid is located just below the skin, your doctor should be able to feel the thyroid gland during a physical examination. If your doctor feels abnormal lumps on your thyroid gland, further tests would be necessary to rule out thyroid cancer.

Some lumps are benign, or not cancerous. This means that they are rarely deadly, will not spread to other tissues and in most cases will not need to be removed.

A large thyroid or a thyroid with lumps (nodules) is called a goiter. In 90 percent of people, thyroid tumors are benign or not cancerous (National Cancer Institute).

Sometimes goiters are malignant (cancerous). This means that the tumor can spread to other tissues, may be life threatening and in most cases needs to be removed.

Also, the tumor can grow back. There are several types of thyroid cancer; most are slow growing and can be easily removed and treated if diagnosed early (National Cancer Institute).

Symptoms Associated with Thyroid Cancer

There are a few symptoms that are associated with thyroid cancer. A lump in the neck, voice changes, problems with breathing or swallowing and/or a pain in

the neck that will not go away (National Cancer Institute). If you experience any of these symptoms it is important to tell your doctor.

During a physical exam, your doctor should locate and feel your thyroid gland, checking for lumps. Your doctor may then want blood work. A thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) test can determine if your thyroid is functioning correctly.

Screening

If your doctor thinks there is a problem with your thyroid, an ultrasound (a test that will visualize muscles, tendons, and size) will be performed. The ultrasound can find smaller nodules that are not felt by hand and also determine if the nodules are fluid-filled (generally not cancerous) or solid (may be cancerous) (National Cancer Institute).

According to the American Cancer Society, the amount of people diagnosed with thyroid cancer each year has increased. This is attributed to ultrasound being used as a frequent screening tool.

Further screening can include a thyroid scan. For this test you swallow a radioactive substance that is absorbed by the thyroid. A scanning machine is then able to locate any nodules.

The next step for nodule screening would be a biopsy. The doctor will take a small sample of the tumor and examines it under a microscope looking for cancer cells (National Cancer Institute).

Prevention

Understanding your risk factors and getting screened are the best tools to prevent thyroid cancer. In most cases of thyroid cancer, the origin is unknown.

There are several risk factors that can help identify people who are at risk for thyroid cancer. The American Cancer Society states that for unknown reasons, females are at greater risk for thyroid cancer. People ages 20 to 55 are also at a higher risk.

Diets low in iodine may also be a risk factor. In most parts of the country iodine is abundant because it has been added to table salt and a few foods.

The risk increases with radiation exposure. Head and neck radiation, especially in children has proven to increase the risk for thyroid cancer.

As with most cancers, there is a risk due to hereditary factors. An abnormal gene may be inherited; this is called Medullary Thyroid Cancer (MTC).

It is very important to discuss these risk factors and any signs and symptoms you are experiencing with your doctor. It is well documented that screening for all cancers is an important "Key" to a "Healthier Tomorrow".

This column was written by Marissa Hartman, Senior Nursing Student at the School of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh. For more information on this article, please call 412-624-3217. CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of

The Daily News

April 9, 2009



*Electronic
Edition*
McKeesport, PA

33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Centers for Disease Control. For questions or more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit www.healthyaging.pitt.edu.

Powered by TECNAVIA

Copyright (c)2009 McKeesport Daily News 04/23/2009