

# LOVE CANAL MEDICAL FUND

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## Thyroid Disease

Over the years many of the Love Canal Medical Fund beneficiaries have submitted claims for medical expenses related to thyroid disease. Thyroid problems can be related to exposure to chemicals. There have been a number of studies of both workers and Vietnam veterans who have experienced thyroid related illnesses after exposures to chemicals. Therefore, we thought that information on this particular disease would be helpful to you.

The thyroid is a gland that controls key functions of your body. Disease of the thyroid gland can affect nearly every organ in your body and harm your health. Thyroid disease is eight times more likely to occur in women than in men. In most cases, treatment of thyroid disease is safe and simple.

### The Thyroid Gland

The thyroid gland is located at the front and base of your neck and is shaped like a butterfly.

It makes, stores, and releases two hormones - T4 (thyroxine) and T3 (triiodothyronine). Thyroid hormones control the rate at which every part of your body works. This is called your metabolism. Your metabolism controls whether you feel hot or cold, tired or rested. When your thyroid gland is working the way it should, your metabolism stays at a steady pace—not too fast or too slow.

The thyroid gland is controlled by the pituitary gland located just below the brain. The pituitary gland makes thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) which tells the thyroid gland to make more hormones as needed.

If there is not enough thyroid hormones in the bloodstream, the body's metabolism slows down. This is called hypothyroidism (underactive). If there is too much thyroid hormones, your metabolism speeds up. This is called hyperthyroidism (overactive). Certain disorders can cause the thyroid gland to make too much or too little hormone.

### Diagnosing Thyroid Disease

Thyroid disease is diagnosed by your symptoms, an exam and tests. Symptoms of thyroid disease can be much like symptoms of other health problems.

Your doctor will examine your neck while you swallow. The thyroid gland moves when you swallow. This makes it easier to feel. Your doctor also may examine your skin and eyes and check your weight and temperature.

Your doctor can use tests to help find the exact cause of the problem including a blood test, thyroid scan or an ultrasound.

## Hypothyroidism

Hypothyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland is not working hard enough (it's underactive). It is not making enough of the thyroid hormones to maintain your normal body metabolism.

### Causes

The most common cause of hypothyroidism is a disorder known as thyroiditis - an inflammation of the thyroid gland. It causes the immune system - your body's natural defense against disease - to mistake cells in the thyroid gland for harmful invaders. Your body sends out white blood cells to destroy them. The pituitary gland then releases TSH to tell the thyroid gland to make more thyroid hormones. This demand on the thyroid gland can cause it to enlarge. This enlargement is called a goiter.

Hypothyroidism also can result from a diet that does not include enough iodine. The diet of most Americans is thought to have enough iodine because of the use of iodized salt. Other food sources of iodine include, spinach, shrimp, oysters, and lobster

### Symptoms

The symptoms of hypothyroidism are slow to develop. You may have the condition but not have any symptoms for months or years. Common symptoms of hypothyroidism include:

Fatigue or weakness	Weight gain
Decreased appetite	Loss of sex drive
Constipation	Muscle aches
Brittle nails	Hair loss
Puffiness around the eyes	Change in menstrual periods
Feeling cold when others don't	

If your lab tests show that your thyroid hormone levels are normal, some other condition may be causing your symptoms.

### Treatment

In most cases, hypothyroidism is treated with medication that contains thyroid hormone. The dose of the medication is increased slowly until a normal level has been reached in the blood.

Most people with hypothyroidism have to take the hormone for the rest of their lives. The dose may need to be changed from time to time. The level of the hormone in the blood is checked regularly.

## Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism results when the thyroid gland is making too much thyroid hormone (it's overactive). This causes your metabolism to speed up.

### Causes

The most common cause of hyperthyroidism is a disorder known as Graves' disease. It most often affects women between the ages of 20 and 40 years. Women with Graves' disease make a substance that causes the thyroid gland to make too much thyroid hormone. A late sign of Graves' disease is often a wide-eyed stare or bulging eyes.

Hyperthyroidism also may result from medication. Taking too much of thyroid hormone when being treated for hypothyroidism can lead to symptoms of an overactive thyroid. Lumps in the thyroid called hot nodules are another cause. These lumps produce too much thyroid hormone.

### Symptoms

The more common symptoms of hyperthyroidism are:

Fatigue	Weight loss
Rapid heart beat	Nervousness
Feeling hot when others don't	Increased sweating
Changes in menstrual periods	Tremors
More frequent bowel movements	

### Treatment

Treatment for hyperthyroidism will lower the amount of thyroid hormone and relieve your symptoms. Antithyroid medication can be used to reduce the amount of thyroid hormone your body is making. Medications known as beta blockers control rapid heart beat, a symptom of hyperthyroidism.

If these medications don't help, your doctor may suggest treatment with radioactive iodine to destroy parts of the thyroid gland. In some cases, surgery may be needed to remove the thyroid gland.

## Thyroid Nodules

A nodule is a lump in the thyroid gland. You may notice the lump on your own, or your doctor may detect the lump during a routine exam. When a thyroid nodule is found, it will be checked to see if it is benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).

Your doctor also may use ultrasound to examine the nodule. Nodules may be further examined by a procedure known as fine needle aspiration or biopsy.

If no cancer cells are found, your doctor may prescribe a thyroid hormone to decrease the size of your nodule. Or, your doctor may suggest surgery to remove it. If cancer cells are found, further treatment will be needed. Thyroid cancer usually can be treated with success.

Finally, women are more likely than men to have thyroid problems. If you have symptoms of thyroid disease, you should see your doctor and be tested. Once thyroid disease is diagnosed, it usually can be treated with success.

**Remember** that the most important step you can take is to get your annual check up. A routine physical can detect diseases like those of the thyroid before they become dangerous. The fund will pay up to \$250 per year for an annual physical with no deductible costs to beneficiaries.

## Love Canal Medical Fund Contact Information:

If you have any questions please let us know using e-mail, the telephone, or the U.S. postal system. Our e-mail address is [lcmf@adelphia.net](mailto:lcmf@adelphia.net) and our phone number is 716-773-6578. Please, leave a message and we'll make sure that your call receives a quick response. You can also write us at Love Canal Medical Fund, P.O. Box 540, Grand Island, NY 14072.

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