

MANAGING YOUR HYPERPARATHYROIDISM

What Is Hyperparathyroidism?

The parathyroids are four tiny glands usually found in the neck, next to the thyroid gland. They control calcium balance in the body. When blood calcium levels fall too low, these glands make a hormone to restore normal calcium levels. This hormone is named parathyroid hormone (PTH). Hyperparathyroidism means that the parathyroid glands are too active, and people have high blood calcium levels. Untreated hyperparathyroidism can lead to osteoporosis, kidney stones, high blood pressure, inflammation (swelling) of the pancreas, or stomach ulcers.

About 100,000 people per year are diagnosed with hyperparathyroidism, twice as many females as males.

What Causes Hyperparathyroidism?

Most people (85%) have a benign (not cancerous) parathyroid gland tumor (adenoma). Others may have enlarged parathyroid glands (hyperplasia). Rarely, the cause is cancer. Aging increases the risk. Some people have disorders related to other endocrine conditions.

What Are the Symptoms of Hyperparathyroidism?

People may have no symptoms. Some may feel weak, tired, and depressed or have muscle aches and joint pains. They may have less appetite, nausea, vomiting, constipation, confusion, or frequent urination and thirst.

How Is Hyperparathyroidism Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis by measuring blood levels of calcium and PTH. High levels of both confirm the diagnosis.

How Is Hyperparathyroidism Treated?

A parathyroid gland tumor is best removed surgically. Only people with high calcium levels, bothersome symptoms, or possible cancer need surgery. Surgery cures 95% of people.

Complications of surgery include low calcium level, bleeding, and infection. The low calcium level that occurs may be temporary or permanent. Many doctors suggest taking calcium and vitamin D supplements.

The health care provider may just watch people with enlarged parathyroids and monitor them with frequent measurement of blood calcium levels. In an emergency (a very high calcium level), intravenous fluids and medicines may be given to lower the levels.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Hyperparathyroidism

- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider if you have a family history of parathyroid or other endocrine tumors. Make sure that your health care provider has your old records of blood calcium measures.
- ✓ **DO** drink plenty of water to prevent high blood calcium levels.
- ✓ **DO** find an experienced surgeon for your operation.
- ✓ **DO** see your health care provider regularly if no surgery is planned. Blood, urine, bone density, and kidney function tests should be done regularly.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you become dehydrated or immobilized because of trauma or illness, as this may affect your calcium level.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have symptoms of a kidney stone, including severe pain on your side or back and blood in your urine.

✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you notice muscle spasms, face twitching, or numbness around the lips after surgery on the parathyroid glands. These symptoms of a very low blood calcium level are due to a low level of parathyroid hormone and need attention right away.

⊗ **DON'T** let yourself become dehydrated. Dehydration will increase your calcium level.

⊗ **DON'T** take calcium supplements unless your health care provider approves. They can lead to kidney stone formation and high blood calcium levels.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists: Tel: (904) 353-7878; Website:
<http://www.aace.com>
- National Health Information Center: Tel: (800) 336-4797; Website:
<http://www.health.gov/nhic/>

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