What Is a Goiter?
A goiter is an enlargement of the thyroid gland. A goiter indicates there is a condition that is causing the thyroid to grow abnormally. The presence of a goiter does not necessarily mean the thyroid gland is not functioning normally.

What Are Symptoms of a Goiter?
Not all goiters cause symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they may include the following:
- Coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Hoarseness
- Neck lump
- Neck swelling
- Tight feeling in the throat

What Are the Causes of a Goiter?
*Hashimoto’s disease.* This disorder causes damage to the thyroid by one’s own immune system. As the thyroid is damaged, it makes less thyroid hormone. The body adjusts and sends more hormone to the thyroid, causing it to enlarge.

*Graves disease.* This disorder causes the thyroid gland to produce too much hormone, making it enlarge.

*Multinodular goiter.* This condition causes lumps to develop in the thyroid, making it enlarge.

*Thyroid cancer.* Cancer of the thyroid can cause enlargement on one side of the thyroid.

Risk Factors
- Lack of iodine in the diet
- Age 50 or older
- Female gender
- Personal or family history of goiters
- Pregnancy and menopause
- Certain medications, including immunosuppressants, antiretrovirals, amiodarone, and lithium
- Radiation treatments in the neck or chest area
- Radiation exposure from a nuclear facility, test, or accident

How Are Goiters Diagnosed?
Typically, a health-care provider discovers a goiter by feeling a patient’s neck during a routine physical exam.

These tests also detect goiters:
- Fine needle aspiration biopsy
- Radioactive iodine scan
- Thyroid function test
- Thyroid ultrasound

Complications of Goiters
Large goiters can cause side effects such as difficulty breathing, weight gain, weight loss, or sleep problems.

Treatment Options
Some goiters do not require specific treatment. Depending on the cause or symptoms of the goiter, your health-care provider may recommend the following treatment options:
- Iodine supplements for goiters caused by iodine deficiency
- Radioactive iodine for goiters caused by Graves disease
- Surgical removal for goiters that are large and cause breathing problems
- Thyroid hormone supplements for goiters caused by Hashimoto’s disease