Glossary of Endocrine Disorders and Treatments

This glossary is no substitute for medical information and advice from your healthcare provider. This is not a comprehensive compilation of endocrine system conditions and treatments, nor do the entries thoroughly define conditions, their signs and symptoms, or treatment options.

For fuller listings see United Regional's Glossary – Endocrinology and Online Resources – Endocrinology.

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Acromegaly — excessive growth due to overproduction of growth hormone by the pituitary gland.

Addison's disease — also known as adrenal insufficiency, occurs when adrenal glands are damaged and cannot produce enough of the hormone cortisone and often the hormone aldosterone.

Adrenal insufficiency — classified as primary (see Addison's disease) or secondary. The latter occurs when the pituitary gland in the brain fails to produce enough adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH) leading to lack of production of cortisol.

Amyloidosis — rare disease that causes buildup of amyloid, a protein and starch, in tissues and organs.

Antithyroid medications — used to treat conditions that cause thyroid hormone overproduction, such as Graves' disease and thyroiditis.

Bromocriptine — a drug that acts on hormone-producing tumors to suppress hormone production.

Cushing's Syndrome — excessive amounts of corticosteroids, a hormone, in the body. Symptoms vary by individual and may include upper body obesity, bone and muscle weakness, severe fatigue, high blood pressure, excessive facial and body hair growth in women, and reduced sex drive and fertility in men.

Cystic fibrosis (CF) — inherited disease characterized by an abnormality in the glands that produce sweat and mucus. Affects the respiratory, digestive and reproductive systems and shortens expected lifespan, with patients living, on average, into their mid to late 30s.

Diabetes Insipidus (DI) — results from insufficient production of the antidiuretic hormone (ADH), which helps the body conserve the right amount of water. Not related to the more common diabetes mellitus.

Diabetes, Type 1 — also called insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) or juvenile diabetes, the disease makes it necessary for patients to take daily insulin injections and regularly monitor their blood sugar levels. Uncontrolled diabetes may result in long-term complications including heart disease, kidney disease, eye problems, neuropathy (nerve problems) and foot problems.

Diabetes, Type 2 — the most common form of diabetes, it develops when the body does not use insulin properly (insulin resistance) and leads to an inability to maintain normal blood sugar levels without medical intervention and a treatment plan. Uncontrolled diabetes may result in long-term complications including heart disease, kidney disease, eye problems, neuropathy (nerve problems) and foot problems.

Diffuse toxic goiter — see Graves'disease.

Empty Sella Syndrome (ESS) — characterized by an enlarged bony structure (sella turcica) that houses the pituitary gland at the base of the brain. Primary ESS is associated with obesity and high blood pressure in women and with a buildup of fluid in the brain.

Goiter — enlargement of the thyroid gland, in the front of the neck and behind the trachea (wind pipe).

Graves' disease — categorized as an autoimmune disorder, it is the most common cause of hyperthyroidism and is believed to be caused by an antibody that stimulates the thyroid too much.

Hashimoto's thyroiditis — the most common form of thyroid inflammation and the most common reason people develop hypothyroidism, it is an autoimmune disorder that causes antibodies to attack the thyroid cells.

Hirsutism — excessive growth of body and facial hair.

Hyperglycemia — high blood sugar, and sometimes a sign that diabetes is not well-controlled.

Hyperparathyroidism — parathyroid glands regulate the amount of calcium in the blood and when overactive, they cause bones to release too much calcium into the bloodstream resulting in a number of health problems and risks.

Hyperthyroidism — overactivity of the thyroid gland leading to overactive metabolism. There are several types including Graves' disease (diffuse toxic goiter), toxic nodular goiter (or multinodular goiter), and thyroiditis.

Hypoglycemia — low blood sugar, sometimes called an insulin reaction.

Hypoparathyroidism — parathyroid glands regulate blood calcium and when underactive, the resulting reduced levels of calcium can cause muscle spasms, or tetany, excitability of the nerves, and heart rhythm disturbances.

Hypopituitarism — underactive pituitary gland resulting in various symptoms depending on which hormones are insufficiently produced.

Hypothyroidism — thyroid underactivity commonly caused by the body's immune reaction to itself and the resultant production of antibodies against the thyroid gland. Severe cases can lead to a rare condition called myxedema, characterized by dry, thickened skin, coarse facial features, mental impairment, cold intolerance, decreased heart rate, and, possibly, coma.

Insulin resistance — the body needs more insulin than normal to control blood sugar, increasing the risk of diabetes and heart disease. Usually associated with obesity.

Ketoacidosis — severe dehydration due to untreated or undertreated diabetes, which can result in loss of consciousness or brain damage.

Lupus — common name for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, or SLE, a disease characterized by periodic episodes of inflammation of and damage to the joints, tendons and other connective tissues as well as organs including the heart, lungs, blood vessels, brain, kidneys and skin.

Methimazole — drug used to lower the thyroid gland's hormone production.

Myxedema — a rare complication of hypothyroidism characterized by dry, thickened skin, coarse facial features, mental impairment, cold intolerance, decreased heart rate, and, possibly, coma.

Overactive adrenal glands — produce excessive amounts of certain hormones. Symptoms and treatment depend on which hormones are being overproduced.

Pheochromocytoma — an adrenal gland tumor that secretes too much epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline), the hormones responsible for regulating heart and blood pressure.

Pituitary tumors — usually benign (noncancerous), these tumors may affect glands throughout the body and may cause vision problems by pressing against the optic nerves.

Postpartum thyroiditis — inflammation of the thyroid following delivery of a baby.

propylthiouracil (**PTU**) — a drug used to lower the thyroid gland's hormone production in order to manage hyperthyroidism and Graves' disease.

Radioactive iodine (RAI) — a medication administered safely by mouth to stop the thyroid gland from making too much thyroid hormone.

Radioisotope scan — uses radioactive substances introduced into the body to create an image of the functioning adrenal gland.

Sarcoidosis — a rare inflammation of the lymph nodes and other tissues throughout the body.

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (Lupus) — disease characterized by periodic episodes of inflammation of and damage to the joints, tendons and other connective tissues as well as organs including the heart, lungs, blood vessels, brain, kidneys and skin.

Tapazole — drug used to lower the thyroid gland's hormone production.

Thyroid function tests — may include blood tests to measure the level of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) in the blood; an ultrasound exam of the thyroid gland to detect enlargement or nodules; or a thyroid scan.

Thyroid hormone replacement therapy — the use of synthetic thyroid hormones, usually in pill form, to raise abnormally low levels.

Thyroid scan — uses a radioactive substance to create an image of the thyroid as it is functioning.

Thyroidectomy — surgical removal of the thyroid gland.

Thyroidistis — causes temporary hyperthyroidism, usually followed by hypothyroidism.

Thyroxine (T4) — the most commonly prescribed synthetic thyroid replacement.

Toxic nodular goiter — one or more nodules of the thyroid becomes overactive, causing hyperthyroidism.