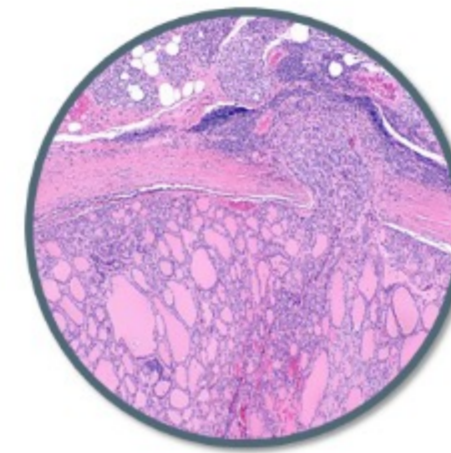


FACT SHEET

Follicular thyroid cancer



What is thyroid cancer?

Thyroid cancer is a malignant tumor arising from the thyrocytes or parafollicular cells of the thyroid gland. It is relatively rare, compared to other cancers. Its presentation is more common in women, especially between the ages of 30 and 50.

What is follicular thyroid cancer?

Follicular cancer corresponds to 10-15% of thyroid cancers and usually occurs around 40-60 years of age. This type of cancer can spread to the lymph nodes in the neck, although it is much less common than papillary cancer. Follicular cancer is more likely to spread to other organs, particularly the lungs and bones.

1 CAUSES

What is the cause of follicular thyroid cancer?

Follicular thyroid cancer is associated with mutations that increase the activity of the PAX8-PPAR-gamma or RAS genes. Follicular cancer is more common in patients with a history of childhood radiation exposure of the thyroid gland and in those with a family history of thyroid cancer.

2 SYMPTOMS

What are the symptoms of follicular thyroid cancer?

The main sign is a lump or nodule in the thyroid, as well as the presence of palpable lymph nodes. However, most cancers do not cause any symptoms. In case of presenting symptomatic nodules, pain in the neck, jaw or ear may occur. If the nodule is large enough to compress the trachea or esophagus it can cause difficulty breathing, swallowing or a "tingle" in the throat. Rarely, it can cause hoarseness if a nerve that controls the vocal cords is irritated. Spread to other organs is more common in this type of cancer, leading to the presence of symptoms depending on the affected organ (example: coughing up blood in lung metastases).

3 DIAGNOSIS

How is follicular thyroid cancer diagnosed?

The diagnosis of thyroid cancer is suspected by measuring the TSH hormone in the blood, which is usually normal or elevated, as well as by obtaining ultrasound images. The confirmatory study is carried out by fine needle aspiration biopsy once the nodule has been removed by surgery.

4 TREATMENT

What is the treatment for follicular thyroid cancer?

The main treatment for all forms of thyroid cancer is surgery. The extent of the surgery (hemithyroidectomy or total thyroidectomy) will depend on the size of the tumor and whether or not it is limited to the thyroid. After surgery, most patients need to take thyroid hormone for life. If the cancer within the thyroid is large or has spread to the lymph nodes in the neck, or if a high risk of recurrence is suspected, radioactive iodine may be used after surgery.

What kind of follow-up do follicular thyroid cancer patients need?

Follicular thyroid cancer patients require serial medical visits to assess for recurrence. These visits consist of a careful history and physical examination along with ultrasound to visualize the neck and look for nodules.

What is the prognosis for follicular thyroid cancer?

Follicular cancer patients who have a primary tumor that is confined within the thyroid gland itself have a 5-year survival rate of 50-70%.



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